

## Playden DC Report August 2017

### 1. Cabinet Meeting 31st July 2017, including:

1.1 Tourism Information Services Contract Re-tender: I was invited by Cllr. Osborne, Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, to attend the O & SC Meeting on 24th July, to discuss and answer questions regarding the Tourism Information Services Contract Re-tender. Currently, Brochure Connect has a three year contract with RDC for the provision of tourism information at a fixed price of £23,000 per annum. It expires on 31 March 2018 and the recommendation is to re-tender the contract for a three year period at a fee of up to £18,000. Robust discussions were held on whether or not the service was useful and should be kept at all, and whether or not we should reduce the contract fee.

The service provides information via three Tourist Information Points (in Bexhill, Battle and Rye) and ten Local Information Points located at key tourism locations across the district. Although the contract requires ten LIPS, there are actually 30 LIPs, which have organically grown across the district - responding to demand from local businesses and through Brochure Connect confirming they would look for additional locations throughout the duration of their contract to ensure an even geographical distribution. Visitors can pick up visitor information on attractions, events and things to do in the district. Brochure Connect keeps literature topped up and updated on a weekly basis. The service has been well received both amongst the business community and users of the service. Businesses have been able to reach audiences that otherwise might not have been aware of their offer. Promoting the district's visitor attractions, amenities and events encourages repeat visits, visitor spend and helps keep visitors within the district. It was noted that as the service is now established it will provide commercial opportunities to bidders.

As portfolio holder for tourism, I explained to the meeting that tourism is an important part of our rural economy and has huge potential for growth. In 2015 (most recent figures available), direct expenditure generated by tourism in Rother District was £238.1 million. This multiplies into £291.6 million worth of income for local businesses. Tourism related expenditure supports 26.5% of jobs in Rother. The provision of tourist information services is essential - and has proven successful. The current service is clearly valued by the tourism sector in Rother, as well as users. Whilst digital tourism is growing rapidly, there is still a demand for more traditional information services, such as TIPs and LIPs, printed leaflets and brochures. These are important for visitors in destination, bearing in mind the demography of visitors.

Re-tendering the contract with a slightly lower budget will generate savings of £15,000 over three years. These savings can be then be directed towards, and invested in, events and marketing. Events are important for attracting visitors to the district, boosting out local economy and tourism offer. The provision of tourist information services supports this and our existing tourist attractions.

Cabinet went on to approve the recommendations.

1.2 Business Rates - reducing the financial burden on local businesses: Cabinet approved for consultation (with businesses, Chambers of Commerce and the FSB) the proposed outline discretionary business rate relief scheme. This scheme is to support small and medium sized businesses facing large increases as a result of the loss of small business or rural rate relief. It is a transitional scheme, designed to reflect the district's issues and support economic and social regeneration policies, ending in 2021. The majority of support is given in the first year and reducing therein. The Government has provided a discretionary fund over four years, with RDC receiving £392,000 in total. There is a list of business sectors that are to be excluded from the relief scheme. Discussion was held as to whether Town and Parish Councils should be removed from the excluded list, but the majority of Members agreed that we need to focus on reliefs for the income generating private sector, as this is vital for local economic activity and prosperity.

The outcome of the consultation will be reported to Cabinet and Council in September 2017.

1.3 Update - Civil Parking Enforcement: Cabinet endorsed that a Task and Finish Group be set up to consider ESCC business case in more detail, focussing on four key objectives: (a) review the ESCC business case on CPE; (b) review the options and key requirements and cost of each option available for CPE implementation; (c) assess the impact of CPE and charging structure on RDC's off-street parking regime (with consideration of including off-street parking in the CPE order); and (d) gauge the appetite of local residents and businesses for CPE.

It is clear that the public want something to be done. Whilst most Members are concerned that CPE will not be well received by the public, we are all becoming frustrated by the lack of enforcement. We are disappointed that the Police do not consider parking enforcement a priority and have officially stated that they will not enforce parking infringements, only dangerous parking. It is clear that CPE will be expensive to implement and that set-up, operational and maintenance costs will need to be recovered through on-street parking charges, should CPE be implemented.

## 2. Shellfield Planning Application RR/2017/1450/P

Both Paul and I have received a number of concerned emails and phone calls regarding the above planning application. There are also numerous objections to this online.

I have a number of observations:

2.1 RDC's Core Strategy requires 5,700 new homes to be built between 2011 and 2028. As at 1st April 2017, total completions were 1,138 homes. This means that the annual requirement for completed homes between 2017 - 2018 is 415 homes. The Core Strategy does not envisage site development in Playden. Playden is not included in the supplementary Development and Site Allocations Local Plan. However, this in itself does not mean that planning should be refused;

2.2 There appears to have been no pre-application, indicating that no assistance or prior advice has been sought from RDC;

2.3 24 new homes with 66 car spaces will increase the traffic on the New England Lane, as well as the A268;

2.4 24 new homes will increase the load on the existing drainage system, but it is unknown whether or not the properties will be connected to the existing system;

2.5 The development is outside the development boundary for Rye and is within the countryside. It may conflict with the saved Policy DS3 in the Local Plan 2006 (*'That the existing settlement pattern will be maintained. The majority of all new development will take place within the development boundaries of existing towns and villages set' out in Policy DS3 (and defined on the Proposals Map)*). This does not include Playden, which appears not to have a development boundary. Policy DS4 may apply *'outside the development boundaries of the towns and villages set out in Policy DS3.....the remainder of the area is shown as countryside where existing uses shall remain for the most part unchanged during the period of this Plan.....the proposal will also be required to demonstrate that a countryside location is necessary for the development'*;

2.6 Rother's Core Strategy holds that development should meet local needs, priorities and aspirations, whilst at the same time sensitively manage the individuality and historic characteristics of a particular town or village. Villages in particular should evolve organically in a manner sensitive to their surroundings. I note that Playden does not have a Neighbourhood Plan;

2.7 Playden is an ancient doomsday village. The number of properties proposed appears to be disproportionate with the existing population size of approximately 340 residents (2011). This may affect the existing character of the village - one may argue that it does not respect, but rather detracts from, the character and appearance of Playden. The size and density of the proposed

development may create an unacceptable loss of privacy and outlook to the occupiers of the existing homes in the vicinity and adjacent to the site; and

2.8 It is not clear from the Proposal Map whether or not Playden is within an environmental designation area (eg AONB or SSSI). If the site is, Paragraph 115 of the National Planning Policy Framework gives great weight to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty of AONB and Paragraph 116 states that major developments in such areas should generally be refused.

**SAH**