

Northern Rother District Councillors' Report March 2022.

The draft Revenue Budget has been balanced for 2022/23 by the planned **use of £3.296m from Reserves. This was not sustainable**, and it would be imperative that the Council delivers on key initiatives such as the Financial Stability Programme and Property Investment Strategy which are aimed at generating income and cost savings. Without action, the financial forecast shows Reserves would be under considerable pressure and may fall below acceptable levels over the next five years. This was attributed to several reasons including significantly increased costs of the joint Waste and Recycling contract. The Council would also be vulnerable to unexpected costs that might arise. There are also risks regarding the impact of the Fair Funding Review and the income from business rates. Delivering a sustainable future remains a significant challenge for the Council.

Capital Strategy 2022/23 to 2026/27.

The Council's CP totalled £132m of which £80m was unsecured funding. A significant part of the CP related to the Council's approved Property Investment Strategy (PIS) and loan funding to the Council's company Alliance Homes (Rother) Ltd. To date, approximately £20.6m had been expended or committed on 11 properties/sites. Income of approximately £1.1m was included within 2022/23 Revenue Budget for PIS assets that had been acquired.

The updated CP continued to minimise the use of Revenue Reserves to fund capital expenditure. For 2022/23, some £1.0m was planned to be used, but this reduced thereafter. Largely this would be replaced by low cost borrowing where appropriate which, whilst having a revenue impact, was spread over a longer time period.

Redevelopment of Beeching Road/ Wainwright Road, Bexhill

Consideration was given to the confidential report of the Director – Place and Climate Change regarding proposals for comprehensive redevelopment at Beeching Road and Wainwright Road, Bexhill. The Director – Place and Climate Change outlined the history of the area and current position.

After consideration of several proposed redevelopment options, Cabinet recommended that the sum £15m be added to the Capital Programme. It was agreed that delegated authority be granted to the Director – Place and Climate Change to enter all necessary contracts, leases and agreements to facilitate the redevelopment of land at Beeching Road and Wainwright Road, Bexhill, in consultation with the Property Investment Panel and the Cabinet Portfolio Holders for Strategy and Transformation and Finance and Performance Management.

COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund (CARF) – Discretionary Non-Domestic Rate Relief Scheme.

Consideration was given to the report of the Revenues and Benefits Manager that set out details of the Government's COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund (CARF) – Discretionary Non-Domestic Rate Relief Scheme to assist businesses affected by the pandemic and who were ineligible for existing support linked to business rates. The Council would be reimbursed where relief was granted using discretionary powers under section 47 of the local Government finance act.

Cabinet formally approved the CARF scheme and agreed that delegated authority be granted to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holders for Finance and Performance Management and Economic Development and Regeneration to finalise the amount of reduction and detailed criteria.

Electric Vehicle Charging in Car Parks Owned by Rother District Council.

Cabinet gave consideration to the report of the Head of Neighbourhood Services which detailed the delivery of electric vehicle (EV) charging points in Council owned car parks across the district. The report had been considered by the Climate Change Steering Group on 13 January 2022 and a copy of the Minutes had been appended to the report for Cabinet's consideration. A key priority in the Council's Rother Environment Strategy adopted in September 2020 was air quality, sustainable transport and energy.

Government statistics detailed that transport was the largest source of carbon dioxide emissions (37%).

At present there were nine EV charging locations across the district namely Cooden Beach Hotel, Yeomans Hyundai Bexhill, Aldi Bexhill, Flimwell Park, Battle Brewery, The Bell in Iden, Flackley Ash Hill Hotel in Peasmarsch, The Gallivant in Camber and Route 1066 Café at Johns Cross. Unfortunately, not all were accessible to the public. The Council owned 44 car parks, 16 were free of charge (predominantly rural) and 28 were pay and display (predominantly urban). It was noted that East Sussex County Council (ESCC) was responsible for the provision of on-street EV installations.

Cabinet approved the procurement of a Provider to install EV charging infrastructure in selected Council owned car parks at nil capital investment to the Council. It was essential that a robust attractive specification be presented at the procurement stage to ensure that the Council received a suitable and sustainable long-term contract. It was noted that significant investigation had commenced regarding understanding the market.

Civil Parking Enforcement'

It is proposed:

1/ that car park charges be suspended in The Polegrove, Bexhill and Rye Salts for 12 months and then either reinstated or removed according to levels of use

2/That on-street directional signage for long stay car parks be reviewed on a continual basis as business as usual

3/ recommendations on changes to car park charges remain within the annual 'fees and charges' report as part of the overall setting of the Council budget.

Councillors Tony Ganly and Martin Mooney.