

Northern Rother District Councillors' Report January 2024.

PCSO reports:

Staplecross: Number plates stolen from a vehicle and outbuildings and vehicles broken into. Machinery and tools stolen.

Northiam: Break in at a property in Tufton Lane where a quad bike was stolen.

Break in at a property in Adams Lane where a search inside the property had taken place and a small flat screen TV was stolen.

Break in at Great Dixter, unknown what has been stolen at the moment.

Attempt to steal a quad bike at a farm along Beckley Road.

Beckley: Property broken into along Main Street, jewellery and Christmas presents stolen.

Shed broken into along rectory lane, tools and chainsaws stolen.

Rural Community Infrastructure Grants scheme.

RURAL communities across Rother could benefit from thousands of pounds to help fund projects that support local community facilities and services.

Rother District Council has opened its £100,000 Rural Community Infrastructure Grants scheme and the authority is now calling on groups and organisations in rural areas of the district to apply for funding.

Projects that could benefit from the grant scheme might include EV charging points for community use; community energy schemes such as scaled up biomass, heat pumps or solar; capital grants for kitchens in community hubs; and initiatives to protect local businesses and community areas from natural hazards including flooding and coastal erosion.

Capital grants up to a maximum of £20,000 per project can be applied for and all proposals must have at least 20 per cent of the total funding needed already in place.

Funding for the Rural Community Infrastructure Grants fund is provided by the UK Government through the Rural England Shared Prosperity Fund to support projects in rural areas outside of Bexhill and the surrounding area.

The grant scheme opened on December 1. The funding is available until March 2025 and applications will be awarded on a first come first served basis until the total budget has been awarded.

For more information and to check eligibility, visit www.rother.gov.uk/regeneration/uk-shared-prosperity-fund/rural-community-infrastructure-grants/. Rother Voluntary Action can provide guidance and support with applications to the scheme.

Coronation Living Heritage Fund (CLHF).

The Council has obtained grant funding of £76,173.50 from the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) via the Coronation Living Heritage Fund (CLHF). The CLHF was to enable more trees to be planted in non-woodland locations and close to where people lived, providing a visible and lasting tribute to the King's Coronation within local communities.

The CLHF was split into two lots, Lot 1 offered capital grants to local authorities for the planting of Micro Woods and subsequent establishment costs for up to three years; Lot 2 was an onward grant scheme, enabling local authorities to provide capital grants to community groups to create Community Orchards.

The Council was awarded £27,149 from Lot 1 to plant three Micro Woods, in the eligible locations within the district, namely Battle, Bexhill and Rye and £49,024.50 of funding from Lot 2 for Community Orchard grants. It was hoped that suitable training would also be provided to those groups maintaining the Community Orchards to ensure that the orchards were pruned to fruiting standard.

The grants will be included in the Capital Programme which supports the Council's commitment to protecting and enhancing the biodiversity of the District, a priority of the Environment Strategy.

Changes to Cash Payments in Rother's Car Parks

RDC is seeking the views of its car park users on proposals to relocate cash payments from Rother District Council owned car park machines to PayPoints. Ticket machines would no longer take cash but they will continue to take both contactless and credit/debit card payments. Instead, people using the car parks could pay in cash at nearby PayPoints which are located, in local shops and businesses.

Currently, payment can be made in coins in 17 of our car parks. Payment is also possible by credit/debit card, RingGo app on mobile phones and RingGo automated phoneline. Using PayPoints to pay for parking is already an option for car park users.

Every year, fewer and fewer people pay by cash. Our breakdown was 40% by RingGo, 30% in cash and 30% by credit or debit cards. However, in the first quarter of 2023/24 cash payments fell by 25% on the same period in 2022/23.

This is the right time to consider changing all cash payments to PayPoint locations. The Council pays £30,000 a year to collect cash from the ticket machines. The contract to collect the cash ends in 2024 and a new contract is likely to cost significantly more.

The Council needs to save money. It has a £3.8 million funding gap in the 2024/25 budget. We are considering every possible saving.

We considered three options. The council's preference is for option one.

Option 1

Relocate all cash payments to local PayPoints for all pay and display machines in all car parks.

All car parks are within 0.2 miles of a PayPoint. Camber car parks are within 0.4 miles but only 2% of payments are made in cash.

There is a grace period given to motorists to enable them to pay to park. Motorists do not have to return to their vehicle or the car park once they have paid at a PayPoint.

Removing the coin mechanism from all 34 pay and display machines would be a one-off cost of £9,500 and updating signage would cost around £500.

. Detailed maps would be put up in car parks to help customers find the nearest PayPoints.

Some Blue Badge holders (for disabled drivers) can apply for permits to park in any of our car parks in any bay without a fee. They are eligible if they are in receipt of higher rate mobility allowance of the Personal Independent Payment, if they are registered blind or are in receipt of a war pension. Therefore, these customers will not be affected. Other drivers with mobility problems might be affected.

The Council is setting up more options for flexible, shorter term parking permits as a cost-effective alternative.

The benefits would be:

Carbon emissions will reduce by 5 to 6 tonnes a year if we remove the cash collections.

£30,000 annual saving to the Council's budget.

More local businesses offering PayPoint facilities and increased business through car park customers using PayPoints.

The drawbacks would be:

All car park users choosing to pay by cash would have to go to a nearby PayPoint to pay their car parking tariff.

We have identified that some vulnerable customers may be negatively impacted including those technologically excluded, without a mobile phone or credit or debit cards and residents with mobility problems, as recognised by our Equalities Impact Assessment.

Option 2

The same as option one except to keep cash payments at the De La Warr Pavilion car park in Bexhill, the Mount Street car park in Battle and the Upper Market car park in Battle.

These three car parks have between 27% (DLWP) and 41% (Mount St) of payments in cash. Again, the use of cash is falling year on year. The remaining car parks would be card-only machines with cash payments by PayPoint.

Mount Street and Upper Market car parks (Battle) are the only charged-for car parks where a one-hour stay is the most popular tariff. The most popular tariff at the De La Warr Pavilion car park is one to two hours stay. Short stays are more likely to be paid by cash.

The advantages of this option are:

Customers could still pay in cash at the three car parks that account for half of the cash payments in council owned car parks. There would be less impact on vulnerable customers but only at these locations.

Some reduction in costs to the council.

A reduction in CO2 emissions.

Some use of local businesses for PayPoint.

The disadvantages of this option are:

A reduction in the advantages listed for option one.

Most of the costs are fixed costs. Reducing the service, like removing some sites or collecting less often, would not necessarily result in significant savings. We also might get less interest from businesses because the cash collection contract would be much smaller.

Option 3

No change, renew the cash collection contract in 2024 as scheduled and in similar terms.

The advantages of this option are:

No adverse impact on customers who want to pay in cash.

A new contract may give us an opportunity to negotiate a reduction in carbon emissions.

The disadvantages are:

The council makes no savings, costs increase, and the council would not meet the financial stability programme. This means a reduction in another part of the service or different service in order to provide a balanced budget.

An increase in costs to the contract from 10% to 15% is expected. This is due to the normal uplift in costs in new contracts and the rise in inflation.

The current contract is in partnership with Eastbourne Borough Council and Hastings Borough Council. This partnership allowed the contract to be the best value for money. If either or both councils do not renew it would increase the cost of the new contract beyond 15%.

Environmental impacts could be included as part of the procurement process, but the Council can't achieve the same carbon savings with this option.

Additional Information

This consultation does not apply to on-street car parking. This council is not in charge of parking on streets or charges for on-street parking. All enquiries regarding on-street parking should be directed to East Sussex County Council.

You can read more about PayPoint here: <https://paypoint.com/>

Councillors Tony Ganly and Tony Biggs.