**NORTHERN ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCILLORS’ REPORT April 2024**

PCSO Reports:



Long Term Plan for Towns Funding for Bexhill 2024-25.

Cabinet considered the report of the Head of Housing and Regeneration which sought approval for the Long-Term Plan for Towns (LTPT) grant funding to be formally received by the Council and added to the Council’s Revenue and Capital budgets. The funds would be provided directly to each delivery organisation following approval by the Bexhill Town Board.

The LTPT was a government initiative administered through the Department of Levelling Up and Communities (DLUHC). It was a regeneration initiative that aimed to support improvements to UK towns, boosting economic growth, improving infrastructure, enhancing social well-being and reducing disparities in areas most in need.

The total grant allocation over the 10-year period of LTPT was £19.510m across revenue and capital. £50,000 revenue funding had been paid in 2023/24, as initial capacity funding for the Council to do the work necessary to establish the Town Board by 1 April 2024. The provisional revenue allocation for 2024/25 was £449,000, the remaining £4,075,000 revenue funding was split across the budget years 2025/2034. The capital allocation totalled £14.936m between 2024 and 2034, with exact spend to be decided through the Town Board. It was noted that the allocation of funding was to the whole of Bexhill within the municipal boundary, including Little Common and Sidley.

The decision-making body for funding priorities would be the new local decision-making body – the Bexhill Town Board. The LTPT guidance stated that the Town Board should involve people from the local community, including businesses, working with central and local government representatives to identify and address regeneration priorities. The Council would be the accountable body for the spend, as well as having a representative on the Town Board and was likely to become a delivery partner for some projects.

The funding would be released by DLUHC subject to a 10-year vision statement and 3-year investment plan. The Levelling Up Partnership Manager, supported by Council Senior Managers and Members, would work with the Town Board to develop both the vision statement and the investment plan, drawing on learning from direct community engagement. The 10-year vision and 3-year, evidence-based, investment plan must have formal Town Board approval.

DLUHC required the establishment of the Town Board by 1 April 2024, with a Chair and Membership identified and with draft Terms of Reference developed for consideration by the Board. The recently appointed Levelling Up Partnership Manager would support the Chair and the Membership and the meetings of the Town Board and any required sub-groups. They would also lead on community engagement, drawing in the expertise of colleagues and partners as appropriate. It was recognised that this new way of working would be challenging for the community and business sectors who would be the decision makers, via the Town Board.

A full economic and social impact assessment would be undertaken for the Town Board programme, alongside that for the Levelling Up Partnership projects funding (elsewhere on the agenda). This would be completed by 1 August 2024 as part of developing the evidence based 3-year investment.

[**High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029**](https://rother.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s9579/High%20Weald%20AONB%20Management%20Plan%202024-2029.pdf)

Members received the report of the Planning Policy Manager which introduced the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2024-2029. The current AONB Management Plan was adopted by Cabinet in February 2019; each management plan covered a five-year period. This Plan would be the first edition of a new 20-year strategy, with a five-year implementation plan.

This new strategy took account of current issues such as the biodiversity crisis, climate change, fairer access to nature, and development pressure. This meant that the range of character components had broadened, and other aspects of the Plan had changed, including the inclusion of cross cutting themes: programmes, principles for action and an investment strategy 2024-2029.

The preparation of the Management Plan had been overseen by the High Weald AONB’s Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), which the Council’s Planning Committee Chair sat on. The JAC agreed the final Management Plan 2024-2029 and its supporting papers in March 2024 and recommended that individual local authorities formally adopt the Plan by the end of June 2024.

The Management Plan incorporated introductions, facts and figures and a Statement of Significance before explaining the Core Character Components that underpin the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB. It set out five cross-cutting themes: Restoring Soil Health and Regenerative Land Management; Nature Recovery and Biodiversity; The Climate Crisis: Achieving Net Zero; People and Access; and Planning and Development in the High Weald AONB. The Plan was supported by a Strategic Environmental Assessment; Habitats Regulations Assessment; Equality Impact Assessment; and a Consultation Statement. Members noted that the plan was not a development plan document, but it would be a material consideration in relation to the determination of planning applications.

 A café has been ordered to pay more than £10,000 after Environmental Health officers uncovered a rat infestation.

Rother District Council officers visited the site in August last year following a report from a member of the public that there were rats in the café.

During an inspection of the kitchen, officers found fresh rat droppings under kitchen workstations and in the storerooms, rat paw prints in the dust behind a chest freezer, food packaging gnawed by rats and empty packets of rat poison which also had been gnawed by rats. The business was open and trading, with staff preparing food as the inspection took place.

A hole was also found in the storeroom, which acted as an entry point for the rats, and more rat droppings were found behind the building where rubbish was piled up.

Further investigations found that Food Hygiene records, a legal requirement for any food business, were not up to date.

The director of the café was questioned by officers and admitted that she was aware of the rat infestation. She said she had tried to get help but had not been successful. She immediately and, voluntarily, closed the business and began making the necessary improvements. The café remained closed for one week until the infestation was eliminated, a deep clean completed, the rat entrance holes blocked and the record keeping recommenced.

On Thursday, April 25, at Hastings Magistrates’ Court the director of the cafe pleaded guilty to three offences under Food Hygiene legislation.

The cafe was fined a total of £6,000 for the three offences and ordered to pay a £2,400 surcharge and full costs to RDC of £1,724.51.

**Cllr. Tony Ganly & Cllr. Tony Biggs.**