

Northern Rother District Councillors' Report October 2024.

At last, there is some progress in resolving the issue at Hobbs Lane, Beckley. The Environmental Health officer reports:

“Yesterday 26 September I returned to Hobbs Lane and witnessed all waste had been removed and the ground had been thoroughly swept clean. “

Council Plan Consultation Exercise

The aim of the six-week consultation was to ensure residents, key stakeholders and businesses had an opportunity to comment on the Plan and feed back on whether it reflected the key issues and areas of focus for the district. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) would be considering the Plan at its meeting being held on 9 October 2024.

The evidence base for the draft Plan was the State of the District report, which was reviewed by the OSC in June (Appendix C to the report). Other strategic documents, notably the Local Plan and Climate Strategy, were reflected in the outcome statements, objectives and actions outlined in the draft Plan.

The draft Plan set out a longer-term vision for the district to provide a steer for future plans and strategies to 2040. The following four strategic outcomes to 2028 had been identified to deliver the 2040 vision:

- A Thriving Local Economy
- Live Well Locally
- Green to the Core
- Fit for the Future

Each of the four strategic outcomes was a separate chapter within the draft Plan with a main statement that outlined medium term aspirations, details of objectives, actions and success measures. Further SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely) action planning was needed, which would follow the period of consultation and be included in the final copy.

The consultation exercise will last six weeks, followed by a period of analysis required to prepare a final draft Plan for Cabinet to consider on 4 November 2024 and full Council approval in December. The consultation would focus on support for the vision, the four strategic outcomes and interest in engagement from potential partners.

Lease of Community Hub and Land at Sidley Recreation Ground

In January 2023, the Council secured approximately £2.1m from the then Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Levelling Up Fund (LUF) for two capital schemes, one of which was Sidley Community Hub.

The scheme seeks to help address inequalities in the town's most deprived ward through the development of a community 'hub' in place of the existing dilapidated changing rooms/pavilion at Sidley Recreation Ground. The new 'hub' would support the existing functions of the recreation ground and provide new sports, arts, culture and learning opportunities for the community. Conditional planning consent for the new hub was secured in July 2024 under RR/2024/935/P and, once built on Rother District Council (RDC) owned land, it would be an RDC asset.

On completion of the construction phase, it was proposed to enter into a 30-year lease to confer all maintenance, repair and management obligations for the new building and car park to the Heart of Sidley Community Association (HOSCA). The 30-year lease was considered an acceptable term legally and could be reviewed and renewed at the end of that period. The café and rooms available for hire would enable HOSCA to generate an income and it was noted

that the toilets would be available to users of the recreation ground when the café was open to the public. Fund raising would also be required to ensure it was self-sustaining into the future and Members were reassured that there was enthusiastic community buy-in by HOSCA to make it work.

It was also proposed that responsibility for maintenance of the pitch and surrounding run-off strip would also pass to HOSCA under a rolling licence, in keeping with the Council's approach to the devolvement of the maintenance of its sports pitches across the district to relevant clubs and organisations.

As the proposed lease was more than seven years and considered a disposal under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972, the public open space being leased would need to be advertised and any objections reported to Cabinet for further consideration. Whilst there was also a requirement for best consideration to be achieved, this could be disapplied under an exemption based on social wellbeing.

Community Grants Scheme

The Council's Community Grants Scheme (CGS) makes provision for up to £130,000 per annum to be made available to community groups or organisations that met the grant criteria of the CGS. The CGS Panel had delegated authority to grant awards up to £1,000 and it was noted that one application had been received in Round 1: Rye Bay Football Club for £500.

Round 1 for 2024/25 closed on 7 July 2024. Only two applications were received, one had withdrawn and would be re-submitted for Round 2. The Panel met on 25 July 2024 and recommended the award to the one applicant, The Good Story Initiative. If agreed, this would leave £114,400 for Round 2 medium and large grants.

It was noted that small grant and Rother Reduce Reuse Recycle applications were accepted all year round through the on-line application process. Support and guidance could be obtained via Rother Voluntary Action (RVA) and applicants were recommended to contact RVA before submission of an application.

Since the Rother Community Lottery's (RCL) launch in April 2022, approximately £52,000 had been facilitated by RCL, with 84 causes registered.

IMPORTANT

There is a proposal to remove Parish Councils from the list of organisations able to apply for these grants. Both your District Councillors intend to speak against this proposal at the Cabinet meeting next week.