

NORTHERN ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT JUNE 2025

In the past month there have been burglaries in domestic properties in Beckley, Playden, Peasmarsh and Rye. the police think the same person/ persons carrying out these crimes so could you make your parishioners aware of this.

We have in the last month continued to contact officers at Rother re planning and enforcement issues for residents in Northern Rother.

Report from our PCSO for Northiam and Beckley:

Northiam

7th – A recovery lorry was stolen from Crockers Lane overnight.

Beckley

11th – Someone removed a garden umbrella from the back garden property in Clayhill around 1815hrs. They ran off when the occupant heard them.

12th – A burglary at a property in The Stream between 0900-1045hrs, untidy search, money & jewellery stolen.

12th – A burglary at a property in Main Street between 0830-1230hrs, untidy search. Does not look like anything was taken.

There was also a further burglary in Playden that morning, which is being linked to the 2 in Beckley.

A verbal report will be given for our PCSO for Ewhurst and Bodiam.

Rother helps to promote a Healthy Start:

The cost of the weekly shop keeps on rising so keeping your children topped up with healthy food options can sometimes feel like a very difficult mission.

But did you know that if you're more than 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under the age of four, you may be entitled to get help to buy healthy food and milk?

Those eligible for the NHS scheme will be sent a Healthy Start card with money on it that can be used in some UK shops.

The benefit is added onto the card every four weeks which can be used to buy fruit and veg, milk, formula and even vitamins.

This month, Rother District Council is joining with the other District and Borough Councils in East Sussex, plus the County Council to promote the scheme.

People who are more than 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under the age of four, and get either Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, or Pension Credit (which includes the child addition) can apply.

You can also apply if you're under 18 years old and not getting any benefits, or if you're getting Income-related Employment and Support Allowance. To find out more and check eligibility, Rother residents can either visit Get help to buy food and milk (Healthy Start), email: healthy.start@nhsbsa.nhs.uk or telephone: 0300 330 7010.

Public Convenience Buildings Update

Cabinet members received an update report on plans for local businesses to lease public convenience sites.

In late 2024, 14 sites were put forward. The plan was for businesses to open and at the same time provide public conveniences for residents and visitors.

Subject to approval, 12 sites have been chosen, located in Battle, Bexhill, Rye, Sedlescombe, and Winchelsea. The vast majority are planned to open as coffee shops.

Cabinet noted that in addition to the sites in question, there are a further 15 public conveniences that will remain open across the district, operated by a combination of Rother District Council and Parish & Town Councils.

Cabinet approved the plan to lease the 12 public convenience buildings.

A new Local Plan.

The district council is currently preparing a new Local Plan – this will guide development over the next 15 to 20 years, ensuring it brings the greatest benefit to the community. As part of the process, the public, including landowners, are invited to suggest sites across the district that might be suitable for future development.

Homes are needed in our district but it's important they are in the right place, with the right infrastructure in place, and the people of Rother are encouraged to submit land for consideration via our website – Call for Sites – Rother District Council. The deadline for submissions is Friday, August 1.

Call-in - Public Convenience Buildings Update - Approval to Lease 12 to businesses with commitments to provide public conveniences

1. The Call-In procedure is the mechanism by which the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) can challenge decisions made by the Executive, but which are not yet implemented. Executive decisions are usually published within three working days of the meeting. The Executive minutes are published electronically via the website and notification is sent to all Councillors.

2. Executive decisions come into force and may then be implemented following the expiry of five working days following publication of the minutes, unless the OSC objects to it and calls it in. Any two non-Executive Members, one of whom must have been present at the Cabinet meeting, or the Chair of the OSC, can request that a matter be called in

3. Following the decision made by Cabinet at its meeting on 16 June 2025 in respect of the Public Convenience Buildings Update - Approval to Lease 12 to Businesses with commitments to provide public conveniences, a request has been received from Councillors Carl Maynard and Beverley Coupar, both of whom are Members of the OSC and Councillor Coupar was present at the OSC250707 – Call-in - Public Convenience Buildings Update meeting. After this request, the Chair has also confirmed his wish to call the matter in. The written requests, with reasons, were received on Thursday 26 June 2025.

The following reasons for the Call-In have been put forward by Councillor Coupar: Sedlescombe Parish Council was contacted 17/3/2023 and told 'Rother District Council approved its Protecting Discretionary Services Strategy in 2021. As Rother is now fully parished, the district is looking to move to a predominately strategic and regulatory role. Part of this is to consider how and by whom, discretionary services are best provided with the guiding principle to ensure that discretionary services are delivered by the most appropriate organisation closest to the community it serves.

The Council's approach to the devolvment of public conveniences is:

- i. Devolve to town and parish councils providing limited funding to refurbish
- ii. Retain, refurbish and introduce charges
- iii. If the parish or town council and the community agree that the facility is not required, then redevelop or demolish.'

The parish council undertook a consultation of residents, explaining that to take over the toilets and carpark an increase in precept would be necessary. The subject was discussed at the Sedlescombe Parish Council Annual Assembly in May 2023. Residents agreed that they wanted the parish council to go ahead and take over both community assets. Residents wanted the assets taken over on a freehold basis to ensure that the costs that would be paid for from the precept raised were protected.

In September 2023 the parish council requested a meeting with Rother District Council (RDC) to look at a way forward. A meeting was agreed for 19th September 2023. On 12th October 2023 – out of the blue – the council received a letter from Lorna Ford announcing a trial closure of the toilets.

At this point there was no clarification as to the terms of any lease and the parish council maintained its request for the freehold.

27 November 2023 a meeting was arranged with Lorna Ford, which she was

unable to attend but took place with two Rother officers.

From April 2024 there was little correspondence. The parish council had maintained their desire to take over the village assets and their request for the freehold.

28 November 2024 with no consultation or prior notice – [contrary to the policy notified and highlighted above] – the parish council received an email from Will Wright announcing that the Sedlescombe toilets were to be advertised on the open market.

A letter was sent to Lorna Ford on 30th December 2024 explaining why Sedlescombe Parish Council felt that a commercial operation taking over the toilets was not a good idea.

3rd February 2025 Will Wright sent an email announcing that an expression of interest had been received to convert the toilets to a nail bar.

3rd April 2025 RDC started a new process for devolution of assets.

Parish councils were again asked to express interest in Village assets – Sedlescombe were told there were no assets in scope – contradicting the start of the discussions in March 2023.

The parish council again submitted their EOI and reasons for it.

RDC have never evaluated the Sedlescombe Parish Council proposals. They have never evaluated the value to the residents – both assets were built out of need and using planning conditions as part of other development in Sedlescombe.

RDC has not consulted on any of the processes that they have used in the last two years. The processes have been changed with no advanced notice or consultation.

For all the above issues, I ask this to be called into the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. There was no advance notice or sight of the report that went to cabinet until the agenda was issued. The Parish Council has not had any details or sight of any assessment of the business proposal that have been received and have not been given any opportunity to highlight further the case it has put forward over the last two years to take over these community assets as requested by residents. Sedlescombe Parish council has never refused taking on the toilets, have met all deadlines and feels that procedures that are designed to promote transparency and communication were not followed.

In addition to the above, the following reasons have been put forward by Councillor Maynard:

I would also like to add the following reasons for the call in - directly relating to the cabinet decision:

1. The likely opening hours of the proposed business enterprise would not allow sufficient public access to any convenience i.e. this directly relates to the proposed operating hours of the business.

2. The reduction in the number of facilities available would potentially not be sufficient to allow for satisfactory public access.

In addition to the above, the following reasons have been put forward by Councillor Osborne:

The reason being a perceived lack of consultation with the respective parish councils.

4. The implementation of this decision will now be suspended until such time as the Call-In procedure has been exhausted.

5. The Head of Paid Service has therefore referred this matter to this meeting for consideration. The call-in procedure requires the OSC to meet within five working days of the call-in; however, following agreement with the Chair of the OSC, it was agreed to refer it to this meeting to save on additional meeting costs.

6. There are three options open to the Committee:

i. Refer the decision back to the decision-making body (Cabinet) for reconsideration, setting out in writing the nature of its concerns.

ii. Refer the matter to full Council; or

iii. Not to take any further action.

7. With option i. Cabinet would have to reconsider this matter within 10 working days – this would require an additional meeting of Cabinet as the next scheduled meeting is on 28 July 2025. At this meeting, Cabinet could amend the decision or not, before adopting a final decision. The final decision on this matter would be excluded from further Call-In arrangements.

8. With option ii. if Council does not object to the decision, then no further action is necessary, and the decision will be implemented immediately (the next meeting of full Council takes place on 14 July 2025). However, if the Council does object, it has no place to make decisions in respect of an Executive decision unless it is contrary to the policy framework, or contrary to or not wholly consistent with the budget. The Council could therefore only refer the decision to which it objects back to the decision-making body (Cabinet), together with the Council's views on the decision. The Cabinet would then be requested to choose whether to amend the decision or not before reaching a final decision and implementing it. The Cabinet must meet to reconsider within five working days of the Council request.

Kind regards,

Cllr. Tony Ganly & Cllr. Tony Biggs.