

ROTHER ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS (RALC)

Minutes of meeting held on 22 January 2025, 2.30pm Staplecross Village Hall TN32 5QG

Attendees: David Young (Chairman & Ewhurst), Keith Robertson (Deputy Chair & Catsfield), R. Franklin (Burwash, Udimore), Jacqui Harding (Northiam), David Penfold (Pett), John Barnes (Etchingham), Nigel Franklin (Bexhill-on-Sea), David Todd (Salehurst & Robertsbridge), Karen Ripley (Salehurst & Robertsbridge), Richard Farhall (Rye, Mountfield), Jonathan Vine-Hall (Sedlescombe), Martin Griffiths (Brede, Guestling), Pauline Glew (Sedlescombe), Jenner Sands (Icklesham), Jacqui Stanford (Icklesham), Mary Philo (Iden, Beckley, Pett), Andrew Mier, Julie Miller (Bexhill-on-Sea), Jenny Exley (Battle), Ned Pakenham (Hurst Green), Geoff Thomas (Crowhurst), Lynda Roller (Crowhurst), Lesley Voice (Playden), Phil Burgess (Whatlington), Mark Wey (Brede), Steve Skerman (Sussex Police), James Kelly (East Sussex Highways), Lorna Ford (Rother DC), Andrew Vallance (Rother DC), Joe Powell (Rother DC), Gilian Macinnes (Rother DC), Alice Nolan (RALC Clerk)

Item Number	Agenda Item	Lead
1	Welcome The Chair welcomed attendees.	
2	Apologies for absence Philip Allard (Iden), Natasha Vadorin (Beckley), Julie Ramus (Rye).	
3	Accuracy of Minutes of the meeting held on 9 October *attached Agreed.	
4	Matters arising or reports from Members from previous meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member Survey – reshared by Clerk on 19 December 2024. CIL monies being applied to devolved services – at the last meeting, there was a query raised on whether Town and Parish Councils can apply for CIL funding from the “Rother Infrastructure Fund” to pay for: purchase of/ works to / maintenance of/ upkeep of public toilets (which were previously operated by RDC). The Planning Policy Manager at Rother has provided the following update: The Rother Infrastructure Fund is not for use by Town and Parish (T&P) Councils. However, T&P councils could apply for CIL funding from the “Infrastructure Matched Fund”, which is only for their use. The description of this funding pot states that ‘the provision should be at least 50% match funded from local CIL and/or other funding sources’, however if a T&P Council did not have sufficient funds, the pot does allow for 100% funding if the provision can demonstrate a wider benefit. It is correct that CIL can be used to increase the capacity of existing infrastructure or to repair failing existing infrastructure, if that is necessary to support development. The key point, with all CIL funding, is that final line, ‘necessary to support 	

	development'. That really is the case that would need to be made for an application for funding for toilets.	
5	Update from RDC	
5a	<p>UK Gov Devolution Lorna Ford (Chief Executive) presented an update, and the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government is proposing strategic authorities across the country to cover populations of 1.5 million+ and there are already some in place. For East Sussex, this means a combined authority with West Sussex and Brighton & Hove City Council. The government will be sharing a letter on East Sussex's place on the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP), which offers incentives for councils to fast track the process. This commits councils to Mayoral devolution and elections by May 2026. Only the upper tier authorities were consulted on Devolution, however Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) will involve district councils. Final proposals are due in September. • The geography for the unitary authority (LGR) has not been confirmed but a 'continuing' authority is favoured i.e. East Sussex-wide. In terms of elections, ESCC requested county elections are postponed. This was opposed by Leaders in Hastings, Wealden, Lewes and Eastbourne however Rother supported this position. • For town and parish councils, there are multiple considerations. Notably, protection of discretionary services at a local level that may be lost in a new authority. The precept setting for 26/27 is a key milestone in this process. • Bexhill: Bexhill TC are going to discuss LGR and Devolution at their next meeting. When will we know about elections and what size the elected voter unit will be i.e. how many representatives per population size? RDC: Next steps will be confirmed at the end of January. It is too early to say what the makeup of representatives will look like, but this could follow the existing County wards with double the Members. • Etchingham: The new authority will be in financial trouble from its first day- this is why discretionary services need to be the focus of discussions. RDC: Other examples e.g. Somerset support this view. • Rye: RDC has an extensive portfolio of assets in Rye. They are hoping to set up a working group. Would RDC consider delaying asset disposals of public conveniences? Would assets be transferred directly to town and parish councils? RDC: We will look at the outcome of current asset disposals. A timetable on asset transfers is yet to be confirmed but there is an opportunity over the next 12 months to protect local, discretionary services. • Icklesham: Does this apply to assets currently being leased to town and parish councils? RDC: The assets will automatically transfer up to the new 	Lorna Ford (RDC)

	<p>authority (unless devolved before this point), so they would oversee leases in the future. The shadow authority may have some veto control over asset transfer/disposals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robertsbridge: Do we need to talk about existing leases? RDC: This depends on what you would like to progress- existing leases can continue as is until they transfer to the new authority. • Sedlescombe: How does the Mayoral authority exert control- would this be directly over the unitary authority? RDC: The Mayor must work with the Leaders' group. In terms of Planning, other examples follow the following process: strategic infrastructure, growth, allocation of housing across entire area will be decided by unitary authority and Mayoral planning team assess these decisions. 	
5b	<p>Planning & NPPF Update Gilian (Interim Head of Planning) presented an update, and the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Government are focusing on growth and a significant rise in house building; to support this there have been changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). • It is important for Rother that protection of national landscape is retained, however this does not mean there will be no growth. The Government have also focused on social housing and splitting out types of rent. The NPPF, which is the basis of decision-making, emphasises multiple factors (outlined in full on the attached slides), notably growth of economy, infrastructure provision, and public safety. • The Planning Committee will be undergoing changes, mainly relate to speaking time. • Crowhurst: Where do Neighbourhood Plans fit in? RDC: The NPs remain in the NPPF and are an important part of the development plan. The Planning team will be approaching towns and parishes to discuss increases to housing levels across the district and putting forward sites that do not have a detrimental effect on the landscape. • Salehurst and Robertsbridge: When will the Local Plan be adopted? How does this work with new authority? RDC: The new Local Plan needs to be adopted by December 2026. We must bring forward sites for the Local Plan, even if Neighbourhood Plans are not updated. • Council: At what pace are the utility companies being consulted? RDC: The Government have been clear that utility companies need to support development. • Sedlescombe: Will the delivery rate justify the work put in? Will the Plan fall into a lack of supply soon after being adopted? RDC: If the industry is letting Local Authorities down, we need to be aware of this- more smaller sites means more delivery. 	Gilian Macinnes (RDC)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biggs: How do TPOs affect sites for development? RDC: The TPO gives control but does not prohibit development. • Icklesham: It has been challenging for town and parish Planning Committees when their views are not considered at decision-making levels. This has been evidenced by complaints received from residents on waste overflowing- infrastructure may not support further development. RDC: The Rother Planning Committee is bound by legislation to make decisions regarding applications. Utilities companies should be addressing issues related to infrastructure. 	
5c	<p>RDC Budget 25/26 Andrew (Deputy Chief Executive and S.151 Officer) presented an update, and the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Local Government Finance Settlement, announced in December, presented a real terms cut. • Rother is likely to have a budget deficit of nearly £1.5 million. • There are £1.176 million of savings/income generation included within the budget. There is also growth of £540k largely related Temporary Accommodation costs. Some of the savings' proposals have been controversial e.g. car park fees in rural areas and Sidley, Bexhill. The consultation has received over 1300 responses, mainly related to charges at Northiam car park. • Cabinet will review the draft budget on 3rd February. 	Andrew Vallance (RDC)
6	<p>Update from Highways James presented an update, and the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two senior stewards cover half of the county each. 14 stewards cover the entire county. • Stewards perform safety inspections (via driving, walking etc.). Any defects are raised for repair and inspections take place at varying recurrences. At a minimum, there are 6-7 inspections across the week, 70 inspections monthly. The stewards also attend customer reports in priority order and can complete risk assessments as part of this prioritisation. In 2024, 4642 enquiries in Rother were followed up, 3782 defects raised, and 2355 potholes repaired. • In terms of engagement, Highways hold 6-monthly SLR meetings with parishes and have a monthly phone call with County Councillors. • The best practice for reporting problems is to go online; issues can be escalated to the stakeholder liaison team if needed. • Northiam: There was an instance of two potholes located near to one another, but only one pothole being repaired. What is the process for repairs? Additionally, should stewards be clearing surrounding area once a repair is made? Highways: Scheduling issues for repairs have been reported to the operations team. Stewards should be clearing the surrounding area, and a reminder will be issued. • Burwash, Udimore: There are lots of temporary repairs being made e.g. Willingford Lane. 	James Kelly (Balfour Beatty) ESCC Highway

	<p>Highways: Supply chains should return within 28 days to make a permanent repair. James will send the stakeholder liaison contact information to the RALC Clerk; this can be posted online.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Etchingham: Who inspects drains that are no longer functioning? Highways: We typically rely on public reports for these problems. Bexhill: The Government have announced plans to use AI for assessing potholes- do you have any views on this? Highways: Have seen trials of AI equipment. It can be useful however a human element may be needed for risk assessments. Brede: There is a dislodged manhole cover on a footpath- how can we address this? Highways: Noted the problem and will follow up the issues reported. Battle: There have been issues with springs on Netherfield Road and potholes on the High Street- who has the responsibility to resolve these? Highways: Highways are the first port of call and can contact drainage teams if needed. With regard to the potholes, unfortunately, diversion routes can be put in place, but locals will follow their preferred route. Hurst Green: Where can I find out where you will be working? Highways: Our website is updated every week with the work programme for 3 months. If you need a more detailed response, please contact the stakeholder liaison team. 	
7	<p>Update from Sussex Police Rural Crime team</p> <p>Stephen presented an update, and the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The PCSO for Rother was unavailable for the meeting; Stephen covers mid-Sussex. There are two teams who cover the entirety of Sussex and the office for East Sussex is based in Heathfield. The teams are governed by an Inspector who works from Lewes and each team has a sergeant, 6 constables and 3 PCSOs covering each divisional district. The Rural Crime Team covers agricultural crime (often related to organised crime), wildlife crime (often related to developments), heritage crime, and environmental crime. The work relates to legislation including the Countryside and Wildlife Act. To provide an insight into some of the work covered, over the past three months, as of 18 January, there have been 9 quad bike thefts and 16 wildlife crime reports. The PCSO can be contacted via the 101 number or 999 for emergencies or email ruralcrime.team@sussex.police.uk. Northiam: Does the environmental remit cover fly tipping? Sussex Police: The Local Authority can deal with fly tipping offences. 	PCSO Stephen Skerman

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Burwash, Udimore: Does alteration to listed buildings count as an offence? Sussex Police: Yes, rural police can be involved, although the Local Authority Planning department can be contacted too. 	
8	RALC Budget – for approval. Subscription fees have not been increased so RALC will run at a deficit due to the survey fees. The budget is online Finances – Rother Association of Local Councils .	Keith Robertson
9	Contacts and admin The RALC website is up to date. Going forward, RALC will need a new Clerk- current Clerk to circulate information. Responses to the survey questions are also welcomed- the group could explore more regular meetings or workshop-style sessions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northiam: What would be the collective voice for town and parish councils under the new structure (Devolution)? Chair: RALC is a forum is to determine best practice and lobby ESALC- will raise this point at the next meeting with them. 	David Young
10	Confirm date of next meeting: 23 April 2025.	