

Rother District Council Annual Report 2025



Introduction

In December 2024, we launched our Council Plan 2025-2028, which sets out our vision for Rother and commitment to supporting a vibrant and resilient district. This annual report provides an insight into our progress over the last twelve months, highlighting how our activities and projects have helped to drive change and improvement for local communities. There is a wide range of local needs for our district and demand on key services has risen. This increase, combined with persistent and severe financial challenges for local government, has continued to impact our work. That said, we have placed financial sustainability at the heart of our decision-making and remain ambitious in what we can deliver. Over the last twelve months, the Council has delivered many projects across Rother. Some of our most prominent achievements include the opening of the Camber Welcome Centre, the relaunch of our grants scheme and recognition for our work to tackle climate change.

We have also responded to the government's Local Government Reorganisation programme, which will see Rother District Council succeeded by a new unitary Council in April 2028. Whilst this process will undoubtedly bring changes, we are excited to make the most of new opportunities for the district and have worked hard to provide a foundation for Rother's future. The Council's work would not be possible without the support of our local partners, Members and colleagues. We would like to thank them all for their continuing dedication to supporting outcomes for Rother. As we look ahead, we recognise that there is still much more to achieve. Our focus is on delivering a brighter and more resilient future for the district and we remain committed to tackling challenges and making the most of any opportunities for Rother. We look forward to sharing more updates with you as they unfold over the next twelve months

A Thriving Local Economy

Launch of Rother Wine Triangle: In partnership with Sussex Winelands, we supported an exciting new initiative for our local vineyards to boost wine tourism in the district. The Rother Wine Triangle, which launched in June, includes new wayfinding signage, orientation points and an interactive wine trail showcasing seven award-winning wineries in the Rother Valley. The project has been supported with funding from the UK government and will enable visitors to explore some of the country's most celebrated vineyards. As wine tourism in Sussex continues to blossom, it is hoped that the Triangle will support Rother's economy by showcasing local produce and providing a gateway for visitors to the district's local attractions.

Plans for the De La Warr Pavilion unveiled: Plans to refurbish and modernise the De La Warr Pavilion building are progressing well, with onsite works to begin in 2026. The ambitious masterplan was unveiled in April and is set out in three phases. The first stage, which will be delivered by 2028, is supported by Levelling Up funding and a Heritage Fund development grant. It includes a development of the auditorium and foyers in the Grade I* listed building. These works will not only support longer-term conservation of the De La Warr Pavilion but will also deliver improved facilities to attract more visitors to the area and boost learning and skills opportunities for the local community.

Residents encouraged to shop local: As part of our annual Shop Local campaign, we encouraged residents and visitors to back local businesses and town centres. The scheme

highlighted the vital role independent shops and hospitality venues play in supporting the local economy. Through promotion on all our social media channels, as well as some free parking events throughout the district, we aimed to raise awareness of the benefits of shopping locally and support our local businesses.

Live Well Locally

Relaunch of community grants scheme: The Rother District Council Community Grants Fund was relaunched on 15 September 2025 in partnership with the Sussex Community Foundation. The new grant making programme provides better value for money and reaches smaller communities through a simpler application process – this year, we received 52 applicants. This means that we will be able to allocate the full £100,000 of funding to grassroots projects across the district for new facilities and vital community services. By investing in and empowering our local not-for-profit organisations and community groups, it is hoped that we will be able to support the local economy, encourage environmental initiatives, improve wellbeing and bring people together.

Rother's award-winning spaces: Over the summer, several places across the district were recognised for their scenic coastal views and natural heritage. In Bexhill, Egerton Park was honoured as one of the country's best green spaces for the thirteenth year in a row as part of the global Green Flag Award scheme. It was one of just two sites in the county to be awarded this status, which is used to celebrate well-managed parks and green spaces. Bexhill was also named 'best seaside town in Sussex' by a national newspaper, which cited weather, beaches, crime and fish and chips as some of its key measuring factors. Across Rother, four beaches in Bexhill, Camber Sands, Normans Bay and Winchelsea retained their Seaside Flag Award. They were among thirty-three in the south east to be recognised for their cleanliness, safety and attractiveness.

£1.7 million in grants transforms local homes: Over £1 million in Disabled Facilities Grants was distributed to residents from April 2024 to April 2025, helping people across Rother to live more independently and safely in their own homes. The grants are used to support people with disabilities and improve the accessibility of their houses. They are administered by the council and have supported vital adaptations including accessible bathrooms, ramps, stair lifts and modified living areas. With ongoing Disabled Facilities Grant support, we hope to enhance community wellbeing, improve quality of life, and increase inclusion in our communities.

Improving outcomes for stroke patients: The Stroke Reconditioning Project, which is supported by Active Rother and other partners, helps to address inactivity among stroke patients. This year, over a period of 26 weeks, 75 patients were able to access supervised physical activity sessions and community-based support. Participants reported improvements in their confidence, ability to balance, and emotional wellbeing. The innovative project demonstrated the power of rehabilitation that is rooted in prevention, physical activity, and community connection. In November, it was recognised with an award at the Community Hospitals Association Innovation and Best Practice Awards 2025.

Partners come together for Rother Housing Conference: The Rother Housing Conference was held in Robertsbridge on 28 November 2025 and brought together council officers, developers, and community leaders to discuss challenges and opportunities for housing across the district. The event featured keynote speeches from representatives of the housing development sector, Homes England and Robertsbridge Parish Council, as well as an open panel session. Attendees were invited to feedback on priorities for housing development in Rother and highlighted the importance of cross-sector working,

environmental responsibility, and provision of affordable homes. As housing demand continues to increase, it is hoped that the conference's role in inspiring progress and connecting key partners will support progress towards accessible and sustainable homes for our residents.

Major housing project progresses: Development of the 'Tapestry at Blackfriars' site in Battle is progressing well, marking an important step forward for the delivery of accessible and sustainable homes. Since the start of construction in April, major groundworks have been completed and the structures are now taking shape, with many properties at a roof stage already. The 200-home development will include 130 affordable homes and is the largest development in rural Rother for over 10 years. The project will enhance local housing options and provide high quality, affordable homes for those unable to access the housing market.

Rother selected for bespoke housing support: In July it was announced that Rother has been selected as one of just 10 councils across the country to be a frontrunner for the government's new Council Housebuilding Support Service. The service will provide bespoke support to councils shaped by local needs, helping them to establish, enhance, or accelerate the delivery of high quality and affordable council homes. As part of the programme's vanguard, Rother will be able to work with partners to unlock the district's potential whilst collaboratively designing the future of the service for other councils.

Green to the Core

Recognition of climate change work: This year the council received recognition for our efforts to tackle climate change and was named most improved district council in the country. Climate Emergency UK assesses councils on the actions taken towards net zero, considering a wide range of areas including planning, waste and buildings. In 2023, the council was ranked 50th out of 51 councils, with a score of 19 per cent. This year, Rother was rated 9th with a score of 50 per cent. The scorecard not only helps us to identify areas for further work, but also highlights the scale of action the council has already taken, including our efforts to reduce the organisation's emissions, ringfencing funds for projects that address climate change or environmental issues and introducing a tool to embed environmental impacts in our decision-making processes.

Branching out: Rother's planting projects flourish: This year we've been busy making Rother greener by completing several successful planting initiatives across the district. In February and March, two new micro woods in Battle and Rye were planted. A micro wood is a small forest packed with lots of different native trees and shrubs. These little woods help wildlife thrive and improve our green infrastructure. Both initiatives were made possible through a grant from the Coronation Living Heritage Fund as well as plenty of volunteer support. Through the same fund, the council also distributed grants to seven organisations so they could plant ten community orchards. These orchards will grow fruit for everyone to enjoy and bring people together- and there's plans for another orchard to be planted in early 2026.

Rother achieves silver carbon literacy status: In September 2025, the council was awarded silver status by the Carbon Literacy Project. Carbon Literacy training provides colleagues with an understanding of climate change, carbon footprints, and the impact of their actions. On completion of the course, officers must commit to at least two pledges that will contribute to a reduction in emissions on an individual, community or organisational basis. This marks a significant milestone in our climate action work, with over 30% of staff

accredited as Carbon Literate. We are on track for 50% of colleagues to be trained in the coming months, which will enable the organisation to become gold certified.

New online tool empowers residents to save money and go green: The Homewise tool, which launched in June, gives residents access to practical support that will improve their homes and reduce living costs. By answering a few questions, residents receive advice on how to save money on energy costs, improve their energy efficiency, and local support that is available to them. Delivered in partnership with Energy Saving Trust, this free resource supports the council's wider commitment to tackling fuel poverty as well as our climate friendly ambitions.

Rother declares nature emergency: At its meeting on 15 December, the council declared a nature emergency, recognising the urgent need to protect and restore our natural environment. This declaration highlights the importance of acknowledging the nature crisis and embedding its recovery into council services. We remain committed to working with communities and partners to enhance habitats, protect wildlife and support nature recovery. The council will develop clear strategic targets and build on our success in tackling climate change by continuing to seek opportunities for nature-based climate solutions.

Fit for the Future

People: This year we have taken significant steps forward to improve colleague experience. Our internal communications have become more frequent to support transparency and engagement with colleagues across the organisation. Alongside this, we have completed a thorough review and update of our policies to ensure they are compliant and align with our ROOT values. For customers, we hope that a more motivated, informed and connected workforce will help us to achieve better outcomes and continue delivering essential services.

Financial resilience: The council is legally required to set a balanced budget. In recent years, the demand for our services has grown while the costs of delivering them have also increased. This means that we are under more pressure than ever to make savings. Through careful planning and improved efficiency, from April 2024 to April 2025, we were able to successfully deliver £2 million of savings while maintaining essential services for our communities. Our financial responsibility enables us to make the best use of resources and ensure that we are able to deliver on the priorities set out in our Council Plan.

Digital and customer: We are continually striving to improve our digital offering for residents and businesses. Over the past twelve months, we have adopted a Customer Charter and a Communications Framework to guide our interactions with customers. In October we implemented a new system for our Planning service. These new ways of working have empowered colleagues and streamlined processes for customers, and we will continue to review future opportunities to increase efficiency and effectiveness across all our services.

Making the most of our assets: Our list of assets is varied and covers properties including workshops, heritage sites, cemeteries and open land. A significant amount of activity has been undertaken over the last twelve months to ensure that our asset register is complete and up to date. This record is used to provide an overview of our statutory duties as a landlord and to support effective decision-making.