

District Councillor Emily O'Brien

June 2025 Report to RPC

We continue very busy with all thing's devolution and reorganisation, including ensuring the very best outcomes for residents and the best arrangements for all our assets – whether housing, parks, or buildings, or which there are hundreds across the district, all to be discussed in a ludicrously short timescale imposed by government.

As explained, senior officers will be in touch to set up a meeting with your clerk, this is a process that is going on throughout the district. This is in order to identify wishes and also concerns. As previously explained we have been working on a set of principles to give our officers a starting point and help steer discussions. To be completely clear this is a starting point, and the whole point of having our officers meet with you and the other T&Ps is to listen and to collectively work out what's best for residents and in ensuring the future of the assets for our community – we have given as councillors a very clear steer that the best outcome for residents is where we are trying to get to.

One of the concerns that has been raised by some parish councillors at Ringmer is around Fingerpost Field. It appears this may be in the HRA account which would generally be excluded from this process (because of the requirements of legislation – HRA assets have to be kept separate and in many cases I understand require secretary of state approval for any kind of disposal). Our officers are checking whether or not this is an HRA asset but just to be completely clear, that does not mean that this can't be discussed, this is absolutely something that should be raised at the RPC meeting. We have after all just given RPC a 30 year lease on the land so it's not typical housing land as such. It might in fact emerge that a lease arrangement continued with the new authority is in fact the best way of this asset being managed (as it would protect RPC from unexpected future costs and liabilities) but as I say this is the discussion that needs to be had, it's the whole purpose of this process.

In other news, I continue to be concerned at the continuing influx of proposed development for Ringmer and in parallel, at the planning and infrastructure bill and loss of protection for nature, and residents have been raising this with me. I've set up a letter writing campaign to help people to tell the secretary of state their concerns – at <https://actionnetwork.org/letters/dont-put-development-before-nature>

There was a really useful consultation event held in Barcombe by the SE Water and the local Catchment partnership jointly, regarding the future SE water plans for drought. One thing that has emerged is that the new Arlington reservoir extension is likely to be brought forward from the 2050s timescale previously proposed. The event brought together different stakeholders from the different councils, water companies and groups such as the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust. It was based on the model that emerged from the event we held jointly with Ofwat at Lewes District Council after the concerns I raised (I'm putting this mildly...) about the ludicrousness of proposing to extract water in the Winter from the already stressed river Ouse, to fill the proposed new Arlington reservoir via a pipeline built across the entire district, rather than filling from the Cuckmere next door – which causes a massive local problem with flooding every Winter. The Cuckmere had been rejected due to the 'turbidity' of the water (the wrong sort of water...) but SE Water have publicly committed to re-examining options, for example looking at natural flood management options which might reduce the turbidity of the water (And help with our flooding problems!) and they are also planning to roll out this model of more joined up and earlier stage of consultation throughout the region, and possibly nationally, allowing for flooding, wastewater and water supply issues to be discussed in the round and with local expertise in the room.

I have also been asked by Ofwat to do a session around the 'rights of river' approach we have pioneered at LDC presenting to senior water company managers, which should be amusing if nothing else.

LDC have secured £3.9 million from government for 'warm homes' across east sussex, as a cross-council consortium we are leading, we will be publicising this after our upcoming cabinet meeting, but I'm including info below in case the parish council would like to publicise locally.

Do respond (and encourage others to) to ESCC's underwhelming freight strategy consultation, highlighting the HGV issues in Ringmer. And hopefully see you at the Ringmer pool grand opening on 14th June. And as ever please get in touch if I can be of help.

To contact the Warm Home Check service, visit www.warmeastsussex.org.uk , text WARMHOME to 88440 or call 0800 464 7307.

The Warm Homes Local Grant provides energy performance upgrades and low carbon heating to households that:

- are low income
- have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) between D and G
- are privately owned (owner occupied or privately rented).

If someone does not know their home's EPC, they can find it out when they apply.

A household's income must usually be £36,000 a year or less. If they earn more than that, they might still be eligible if either:

- they live in a certain postcode area
- someone in the household is getting certain benefits.

Emily O'Brien (She/her)

Green Party Councillor for Ouse Valley & Ringmer

Cabinet Member for Nature, Climate & Food Systems at Lewes District Council

Deputy Chair, Local Government Association People & Places Board