

Minutes of a Meeting of the Town Council held at the Town Hall, Rye, on Monday 9 February 2015

PRESENT Councillors Granville Bantick, Bernardine Fiddimore (**Mayor**), Mike Boyd, Mike Eve, Heidi Foster, Jo Kirkham, Ian Potter, Shaun Rogers, Sam Souster

IN ATTENDANCE Richard Farhall - Town Clerk; Kevin Barry – Town Sergeant; Nicky Ledger – Town Steward; Peter Cosstick – Heritage Centre Manager; The Reverend Canon David Frost; District Councillor Lord Ampthill; Colonel Anthony Kimber – Rye Neighbourhood Plan Vice-Chairman; Andy Hemsley - *Rye Observer*; 13 members of the public

Prior to the meeting prayers were said by the Mayor's Chaplain.

The meeting commenced at 6.34pm.

77 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence – and the reasons (as notified to the Clerk) - were accepted from Cllrs John Breeds, Jonathan Breeds (**Deputy Mayor**), Nigel Jennings, Adam Smith and Mary Smith.

It was noted that County Councillor Keith Glazier was unable to attend.

78 CODE OF CONDUCT

Cllr Ian Potter **90** Rye Academy Trust Director

79 MAYORAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor had been pleased to have been invited to the opening night of Rye Kino – which is proving to be extremely popular.

She had attended a number of Confederation meetings. The Confederation would be presenting HM The Queen with a scroll to mark the point at which she becomes our longest-reigning monarch.

*The Mayor adjourned the meeting (see **Appendix A.**)*

7.37pm The meeting reconvened.

80 COUNCIL MINUTES

RESOLVED To adopt, as an accurate record, the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2014 (C9).

81 COMMITTEE MINUTES

(a) **Planning & Townscape**

RESOLVED To adopt the Minutes of the meetings of the Planning & Townscape Committee held on 8 December 2014 (PT13), 12 January 2015 (PT14), 12 January 2015 (PT15) and 26 January 2015 (PT16).

82 FREDA GARDHAM PLAYING FIELD

(a) Rent

Members were advised that the five-yearly rent review had been due on 1 January 2015 and were asked to agree the annual rent (£500pa since 2005) for the next 5 years.

Comments included: the rent had been frozen for 10 years – there was a reasonable case for a modest increase; the Rugby Club receives revenue from allowing caravans to pitch on the field – RTC should request a copy of its accounts; young people in Rye have relatively few facilities available to them.

Speaking from the Gallery, Tony Pierce advised that the Club receives (an invaluable) £1,500-£2,000pa from caravanners – adding that many of them spend in the town. The revenue supports also the Cricket Club – its 3rd and 4th teams use an artificial wicket in the summer and help with maintenance.

RESOLVED To freeze the rent payable by Rye Rugby FC at £500pa for a further 5-year term.

(b) Drainage

Members noted that the owner and tenant of the dwelling adjacent to the entrance to the Field have, for over a year, contended that the drainage installed under the entrance track is inadequate, resulting, periodically, in their garden being flooded.

RESOLVED To commission a basic land drainage survey. Clerk

83 CHARITY WISHING WELL

The Council was invited to give initial consideration to a request from the Rotary Club that, subject to planning consent, it be permitted to install a charity wishing well outside Rye Heritage Centre.

Comments included: installing a well could result in the area appearing to be cluttered; the Strand Quay (EA land) is more suitable – safe passage can be gained via the pedestrian crossing and there is CCTV.

RESOLVED To ask Rye Rotary to identify a site other than the Heritage Centre.

84 RYE CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL 2015

Members were invited to accept Peter Cosstick's offer to deliver – on behalf of the Town Council and without charge – the illumination of at least 17 lamp posts, the lighting up of Rye Railway Station and the provision of a large Christmas tree at Strand Quay. (Members noted that the Draft 2015-16 Town Hall Budget provides for £4,500 towards supporting the 2015 Rye Christmas Festival.)

Peter Cosstick emphasised that he was not offering to take responsibility for the 'string lighting' in the town – there are some serious safety issues that need to be addressed. The existing lamp post displays (that had been in storage) had been checked by an electrician and found to be in good condition. The main cost is the 'put up and take down'. He was confident that he would be successful in securing sponsorship.

The Mayor advised that there was considerable interest in improving this year's Christmas Festival and that a steering group had been formed.

85 TOURISM AND EVENTS OFFICER

The meeting considered a proposal that the Council appoints a (self-employed) Tourism & Events Officer.

Cllr Eve advised that the origins of the proposal lay in the £15,000 that RTC had ring-fenced – a year ago – towards the appointment of a Business Development post for the town. Unfortunately, the Chamber had been unable to source match funding. The main purpose of the post would be to attract additional visitors to the town for the benefit of businesses, residents (in the form of employment) and service users. Establishing the role would be a positive act and RTC would set the post holder's priorities.

The Clerk suggested that the role could include supporting proposals for new events; dealing with filming and media enquiries; monitoring/assisting with the Rye Christmas Festival; and checking signage and publicity material aimed at visitors.

Cllr Foster suggested that events were put on already by a range of organisations without the need for assistance.

Cllr Potter continued to support the original proposal of a partnership with the Chamber of Commerce to appoint a Town Manager (or similar) and was not wholly in favour of a proportion of the funding provision being used to support new events. The Rye Festival Committee had trustees with the experience necessary to run its own affairs.

Cllr Rogers considered also that most festival/event organisers did not require assistance. The funding should be used to attract inward investment – which would lead to improved education/training opportunities, job creation and raise wages to nearer the national average.

RESOLVED Not to appoint a Tourism & Events Officer.

86 GRANT APPLICATIONS

Members noted that the forecast revenue grant balance as at 3.3.15: (assuming the adoption of **b** – below) was £4,750.

a) Sussex Community Rail Partnership

The meeting was invited to consider an application for £500 towards providing seating, a small garden and a paved area outside Rye Station.

It was agreed that the work proposed would benefit the area greatly.

Cllr Potter observed that the applicant pays corporation tax and has £40,000 in reserves.

RESOLVED Not to award a grant.

b) Rye Christmas Festival 2014

RESOLVED To grant £1,000 to Rye & District Chamber of Commerce towards the taking down of the 'string lighting'. Clerk

87 PAST MAYOR BADGES

Members were asked to consider Cllr Mary Smith's request that the Council reviews the provision – within the 2014-15 Town Hall Budget - of £1,050 towards the estimated cost of purchasing 3 badges.

RESOLVED Not to consider the request.

88 DRAFT BUDGETS 2015-16

RESOLVED To approve the draft budgets for the Town Hall and Heritage Centre (as Recommended by the PRGP Committee) - and to agree that the precept for 2015-16 shall be £108,767.

89 MILLENNIUM WALL

Members noted that Southern Gas Networks will not consider granting the Town Council a Licence and also its solicitors concerns about future liability for the (known) environmental and contamination issues associated with the land upon which the Wall is sited.

Cllr Potter requested a named vote on the PRGP Committee Recommendation that RTC should proceed with its previous resolution to accept a transfer of the property.

**PROPOSAL FOR RESOLUTION That RTC should proceed to sign the Draft Transfer Deed presented to the PRGP Committee on 28 July 2014.
For: Bantick, Eve, Boyd, Fiddimore, Foster, Kirkham, Rogers, Souster
Against: none
Abst: Potter
CARRIED**

Cllr Potter re-stated his interest in the item following:

90 FORMER LOWER SCHOOL SITE

RESOLVED To support the Rye Academy Trust's application for the former Lower School site to be added to the Rother Assets of Community Value Register.

91 DRAFT PROVISIONAL TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS 2015-16

RESOLVED To adopt the Draft Provisional Timetable of Meetings 2015-16.

92 WORKING GROUPS

RESOLVED To adopt the PRGP Committee's Recommendation that the:

- (a) **Adverse Weather and Annual Town Meeting WGs be disbanded on the grounds that they have fulfilled their remits;**
- (b) **Public Conveniences and Bus Shelters WGs be merged;**
- (c) **Clerk be asked to progress consideration of replacement *Standing Orders* and *Financial Regulations* with WG members by email.**
- (d) **Local Affordable Accommodation WG be asked to proceed to hold an initial meeting.**

93 URGENT ITEMS

There was none.

The meeting ended at 20.15

Date Chairman

b) Rye Town Steward

Nicky Ledger (NL) reported that:

- He had surveyed the Parish and reported a considerable number of defects.
- He – and RTC's 4x4 - were based at ARRCC, New Road.
- His remit covers the whole of the Parish.
- His primary role is to improve the appearance of the public domain – which entails (amongst other duties) cutting back vegetation and litter removal.
- He had met with ESCC's Highways Steward for the area.
- He had cleared and tidied Conduit Hill and the look-outs.
- One of the ways he was engaging with parishioners was via a Facebook page.
- He had met with residents to discuss their concerns.
- He can be contacted via the Town Hall.

Cllr Foster advised that the Green Steps needed some clearance. NL advised that he had made a start on cutting back the vegetation.

It was agreed generally that the post was having a positive impact.

a) Rye Rugby FC

The Club's Chairman, Tony Pierce reported that:

- The Club has around 20 adult members.
- 20-30 children attend the Sunday morning training.
- Interest/Participation fluctuates.
- The temporary portacabin needs repairs (it was 20 years old when acquired).
- Regular costs include electricity and emptying the cess pit (monthly).
- The Rugby World Cup takes place this year and provides an ideal opportunity to promote the sport.
- The Club needs more coaches.
- The £500pa rent paid to RTC is 'manageable'.
- Sources of revenue include: £2,800 membership fees; an annual Children's Tournament (which involved 800 children last year).
- The Cricket Club uses the field in the summer.

c) Report of the County Councillor

There was no report.

d) Report of the Rye District Councillors

Cllr Lord Amptill See *Appendix B*.

Paul Carey advised that the Bexhill Special Expense costs each Council Tax payer around 20% less than that paid by Rye Council Tax payers towards the Rye Special Expense. Adding in the benefit Bexhill residents get from the substantial subsidy given by RDC to the De La Warr Pavilion, it could be concluded that Rye is getting a raw deal.

Cllr Amptill responded that, at 45,000, the population of Bexhill is much higher than Rye's. The De La Warr Pavilion used to cost Rother tax payers £1mpa but, thanks to the involvement of the Arts Council, this has been reduced to £1/2m. It may be possible to negotiate a more favourable arrangement at some future point. 20 of the 38 Rother councilors represent rural areas.

Cllr Souster explained that the Special Expense funds work undertaken by RDC that would normally be carried out by the local parish/town council.

The Mayor observed that the De La Warr Pavilion is accessible to all (as are public facilities in Rye).

Paul Carey suggested that, proportionately, the running costs of the Rye Sports Centre and Pool are no different than those incurred by similar facilities in Bexhill.

Cllr Amptill advised that RDC provides the Rye Sports Centre and Pool with a £170,000pa subsidy; however, it is looking at ways of reducing its support of such facilities. Cllr Souster added that the intention is to remove the subsidy entirely.

Paul Carey advised that Rye & District Swimming Pool's previous research suggested that the Rye pool serves a population of c26,000.

Paul Carey observed that a Government Minister had taken RDC to task over lack of transparency in relation to payments made to former senior officers. Cllr Souster stated that it appeared that members of the controlling only had been made aware of this correspondence. Cllr Amptill advised that he had not been party to this.

Responding to a question put by Cllr Potter, Cllr Amptill stated that he would seek to confirm that the taking over of the management of the Rye allotments by the Rye Amenity CIC had resulted in the Rye Special Expense being reduced accordingly. [He later advised that the sum allocated to allotments had been reduced to zero.]

Cllr Eve expressed concern that there appeared to be no long-term business strategy in place for the De La Warr Pavilion – despite RDC's considerable contribution it is run by trustees. He considered that the ticket prices for some events was too low and that this was placing those in the commercial sector at a disadvantage.

Cllr Amptill advised that it was not possible currently to re-negotiate the contract because it was mid-way through a 7-year term.

Cllr Sam Souster See **Appendix C**.

e) Public Question Time

83 *Charity Wishing Well* Alan Dickinson and Trevor Collins spoke to this item:

- The formula had been successful elsewhere – there are now two such wells in Keswick and one about to be installed in Gravesend.
- They tend to be sited in open squares.
- The HC had been shortlisted because the public would not have to cross a busy road to the (more open) Strand Quay – which was close to deep water.
- 3 possible locations outside HC had been identified.
- They accepted that the area sometimes gets busy with groups waiting to view the Model.
- The Rotary Club was seeking 'in principle' agreement, prior to applying for planning consent.
- The well would be of brick and tile construction - and of a high quality.
- The Hastings well generates £000s pa for local charities (although some donations go to national and international good causes).

The HC Manager, Peter Cosstick considered that a charity wishing well was a laudable idea but the HC was not the right location. The Hastings well is in an open area. The area outside the HC will become more restricted when the (restored) anchor is returned in March. There was also the risk that the well might be vandalized (and make the area unsightly). Between March and July 50% of the HC's business is student groups and the space outside is needed

to manage the numbers. The closure of the TIC in March is likely to result in increased footfall.

The Clerk added that a Public Access Defibrillator (PAD) is to be installed under the HC external fire escape.

Items 82, 84 and 86 Paul Carey suggested that these all involved requests for grants or concessions – which RTC will be considering without the consent of the Rye tax payer. Responding to a question, the Mayor advised that those seeking grants are required to provide copies of their accounts.

85 Tourism and Events Officer Paul King expressed his support for this proposal. He wondered if the post holder could take over responsibility for producing the *Rye Bay Guide*. Rye Bay Marketing currently publishes 130,000 copies.

Paul Carey expected that a number of councilors would be declaring interests in item 85 by virtue of being involved with 'holiday accommodation'. The Mayor considered that they were unlikely to receive a direct benefit from the post.

C10 APPENDIX B

RYE TOWN COUNCIL, 9th FEBRUARY 2015: REPORT OF ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

I would like to congratulate Rye Town Council on the appointment of the **Town Steward**. This strong leadership bodes well for the future direction of relations between Rye, Rother and The County. Local Government continues to be squeezed by Central Government – way beyond, in my view, good sense: and we have to find solutions together.

I am also pleased that the **Campaign for a Democratic Rye** movement has taken the decision to wind itself up and metamorphose into a supportive body which will take up a range of initiatives on the Rye scene. CDR spent an awful long time on promoting the concept of area committees: but found no interest among other towns and parishes. It has been acknowledged that the Group was quite political. Nothing wrong with that: but assertions should surely be backed up with facts: and I would like, in due course, to show that not all Rother's resources, either capital or revenue, are concentrated on Bexhill. Various buildings and businesses in Bexhill, for instance, earn income which is the property of the whole District – not just Bexhill. And a **special expense** is charged to Bexhill residents only, next year £652,000 net, to cover costs associated with their parks, allotments, Christmas lighting, Museum, bus shelters and Town Forum. We can come back to this topic.

I am also awestruck by the **Cinema** and the enterprise of those who have created such an asset. Even the members of Rother's planning committee played a small part in this - by visiting the old library buildings and subsequently throwing out the previous planning permission for housing when it came up for renewal.

Another unseen Rother service by all who do not use it is the **Housing & Council Tax benefits** service. There are 8,300 claimants in the District and there are 8 officers permanently working on all their cases. £30 million is paid out each year; and, fortunately, almost all of it comes back to RDC from central government – but RDC does the work.

I welcome the **Rye Academy Trust's** decision to seek to register a community asset, namely the Lower School site. The agents marketing the site for Sainsbury/Tesco describe it as suitable for housing – and we cannot doubt that they will ask a stiff price. However, we can dream that a Rye Education Quarter will come into being and that a new school will be built on the Lower School site.

The **Javelin train** came to Hastings the other day: and many Rye folks attended Amber Rudd's meeting and went for a ride to Eastbourne and back. Our MP has put her heart and soul into transport issues. Earlier dualling plans for the A21 were cancelled in 1997: but the process has restarted and she will press for extensions of the dualling from Pembury towards Hastings and improving

A259/A27 bottlenecks. There is an “absolute commitment” to electrification of the line between Ashford and Ore. At the meeting, Network Rail and others talked of the biggest investment in rail since Victorian times; and there was talk of a South Coast Mainline Ashford to *Exeter* railway.

Will it happen? There is no point in beating about the bush. My assessment would be that a continuation of the present Government, or something like it, would give an excellent chance of us seeing an express train from Rye to London in just under an hour within six years. If there is a change of government - which will have other priorities, perhaps in the north of England and Scotland, the project may well be shelved.

In respect of the **Landgate Arch**, the works have been planned in consultation with the Conservation Officer and English Heritage. The hazardous waste, pigeon guano, will be removed - enabling architectural specialists to gain access to the towers. Thereafter, a condition report will enable all of us to comment on the recommended works.

A draft specification has been agreed relating to the procurement of a new seven-year contract for the operation of **Rye Sports Centre**. There will be an option to extend by a further three years – taking us beyond the expiry of the claw-back period of the Sport England grant (£1.9 million) and the expiry date of the ESCC licence to occupy the site. RDC also made a £500,000 grant to the project. Now there will now be a tendering process during which we will learn whether it is possible to reduce the enormous subsidy paid by the District towards, in particular, the cost of operating our pool. RDC does *not* intend to withdraw funding for Rye Sports Centre.

A statistic which may be of interest. The **recycling rate** in our District is currently 47 per cent; and useful income is received which offsets the overall cost of waste collections, street and beach cleaning.

Finally the **Budget**. A proposal will be put to Council calling for a zero rise in Council Tax for the fifth year running. The Rother share of your Band D bills is recommended to be £161.19 per annum. Any rise in the tax, by two per cent or above, would trigger a referendum. The Coalition Government is offering, as usual, an inducement (or freeze grant) to keep the zero increase. It amounts to £73,000. If we were to put the tax up by 1.9 per cent, we would bring in £109,000 of income. The difference is £36,000 which, on balance, we believe to be a sum which we can find. The Coalition was faced in 2010 with a financial black hole, a mountain of debt. We believe that, for one last time, it is right to support the efforts to reduce the national deficit, and thereafter the debt, caused by living beyond our means.

C10 APPENDIX C

ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT FEBRUARY 2015 TO RYE TOWN COUNCIL

Rye Sports Centre

A Draft specification has been produced to procure Leisure Centre Services. This was agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) with some minor changes on 26th January 2015, and was approved by the Cabinet today. The present contract expires on 31st March 2016, and from that time under a new contract there is an expectation that this will operate a nil cost to the Council (the current subsidy is £178,000).

The current performance requirements are intended to be retained, which is a concern because in order to achieve this specification changes to the operating times may be required, together with increased charges. It has been stated that the car parking charges will be available to the new contractor, except any fines imposed which will go to the Council.

A 7 year contract is on offer with an option to extend by a further 3 years, which will take it past the expiry of the claw back period of the Sport England Grant on 26th April 2023, and the expiry of the licences with East Sussex County Council on 22nd May 2024 for the land on which the Sports Centre and Swimming Pool are built.

The Landgate

At a Liaison meeting with RDC, RTC was informed of the plans to address the poor and deteriorating condition of this ancient monument. No progress had been made to date because the internal condition is so bad, major cleaning is required before the planned structural survey can be carried out. A quotation will then be required and agreed for it to take place and, on completion, the findings will have to be considered and a maintenance programme agreed.

What should be obvious is that roofs on the two towers should be provided to prevent a repeat of the internal deterioration.

Further the Net Draft Budget figure (2015-16) for Antient Monuments and Gazebo is £6,670 and this is clearly inadequate. It will need to be revised if any improvements are to be made to such an important feature of the town.

Tourism Provision in Rother

There is serious concern that this most important service, so vital to our part of the country, is being seriously neglected with the closing of the TIC in Rye, which was the hub for the whole District. 1066 Country Campaign based in Hastings is largely responsible for promoting Rother. Rye is much better served than the other two towns by having the Heritage Centre and with the appointment of a Tourism and Events Officer being considered, together with the future plans, which were discussed at the Policy Meeting, and these will serve Rye well in the future.

Affordable Housing Update

RDC's registered providers have secured £2.8m which will support delivery of approximately 146 units in the 2015-2018 programme, which is across the District, but

only includes 24 units for Rye 2017-18, and these, I am told, are intended for the former Tilling Green Primary School site.

Finally

Community Charge Proposals

Police	:	1.98% increase = £2.79/year
ESCC	:	1.95% increase = £22.88/year
RDC	:	A further freeze for the 5 th year when a £1.9% increase was previously on the cards, as I reported last time.
RTC	:	A freeze

These figures are based on a 'D' band property.

Guess which Council is not up for election in May. The fact is RDC has consistently ignored the precarious state its finances are in, and a new Council in May will be faced with making some serious and possibly far reaching decisions to balance the budget.

If you want to know how all this will affect the budget as a whole and the financial reserves I would suggest you ask my Councillor colleague, who is an RDC Cabinet Member and has played his part in this course of action.

Cllr. Sam Souster
RDC, Rye Ward
09th February 2015