

96b) Rye Chamber of Commerce / Capital Levelling Up Funding

Summary of Status:

- Rye Chamber must commit its £25K levelling up capital funding by end of March 2025.
- Rye Chamber wishes to allocate these funds to the refurbishment of Station Approach public conveniences.
- Rye Chamber can only do this if the cost of maintenance is covered by a third party as our levelling up fund can only be used for capital spend, and not revenue costs.
- RDC is committed to the maintenance of Station Approach toilets until end March '25. While it is likely that they will continue to maintain them for the financial year 25/26 we will not know this for certain until Cabinet votes on the 25/26 budget in February 2025.
- This puts the Chamber under a time pressure – waiting for an answer in February and completing the work by end March is unfeasible.
- On the advice of the Levelling Up Partnership, we are exploring an option that might mitigate this time pressure – and that is to defray our funds to Rye Town Council for the purposes of carrying out the Station Approach toilets refurbishment on our behalf. We are led to believe that in doing so RTC would not be subject to the same time restriction for spending and completing the work.
- Rye Chamber appreciates that Rye Town Council require written assurances on how this might be actioned, and we are urgently seeking clarification and will revert as soon as we have further guidance.
- For the purposes of this Town Council meeting, we are seeking confirmation from Councillors on whether the concept of the funds being defrayed to RTC, and the project being overseen by them would be supported – subject to the terms and the time frame for spending being acceptable.
- Please note – if the defraying of funds is determined to be acceptable, the legal agreement for the project would still be between Rye Chamber and RDC, and the reporting line would be from RTC via Rye Chamber to RDC.

The Long-Term Plan:

- The longer-term plan is that Rye Chamber or RTC – would take over the operation of these toilets within the next three years (or at such point that RDC ceases to maintain them).
- This means either Rye Chamber or Rye Town Council entering into a lease with Network Rail and Rother's interest in and liability for the facilities will cease.

RDC's Response to Date:

"I am pleased to say that we are delighted to accept your offer of funding and are very happy for the Chamber to enter into a lease with Network Rail for the running of the facilities going forward subject to the points below:

1. As you know, Rother don't own these toilets but have a historic lease with Network Rail (formerly British Rail). You will need to contact Network Rail (we can help with contact details) and enter into a new lease with them directly. At this point we will end our lease. Bexhill-on-sea Town Council recently did this with the Devonshire Square toilets in Bexhill and found it was straightforward.
2. You have asked if RDC can commit to running the toilets for the next three years. Our budget position means that we are only able commit to running them until the end of March 2025. The draft revenue budget for 25/26 will go to committee in December and be approved in February 25, when we will know more, but currently we can only commit to the end of this financial year.
3. As RDC are the leaseholders of Station Approach toilets, we will need to approve the scope of works.
4. After the works are completed, if the facility is vandalised, we will not be able to 'make good' to the extent of the refurbishment. Station Approach doesn't tend to suffer too much vandalism, so we hope this won't be the case.
5. Our legal team has asked me to check if the Chamber is an incorporated body.

I hope this covers everything but please let me otherwise. Finally, please extend my sincere thanks to the members of the Rye Chamber of Commerce for this generous offer which will benefit the residents, businesses and visitors of Rye."

Other considerations

Rye Chamber also suggest that there is the possibility of seeking further funding to contribute to the refurbishment of the loos – via Rother Community Grants for funds to add solar panels to the roof of the station approach loos to help with running costs going forward. Solar panels would enable the loos to operate both touchpay turnstiles and footfall counters – both of which The Chamber feels are vital for the future sustainability of the project.