Minutes of a Meeting of the Town Council held at the Town Hall, Rye on Monday 26 January 2026

PRESENT Councillors David Bookless, Mike Boyd, Jonathan Breeds, John Breeds, Cheryl Creaser, William Everett, Bernardine Fiddimore, Vagn Hansen, Chris Hoggart **(Deputy Mayor)**, Pat Hughes, Sue Learoyd Smith, Andi Rivett, Shaun Rogers, Dena Smith Ellis, Andy Stuart **(Mayor)**, Sophie Thorpe.

IN ATTENDANCE Richard Farhall – Town Clerk; Jessica Neame – Deputy Town Clerk; Paul Goring – Town Sergeant; District Cllrs Cheryl Creaser and Simon McGurk; County Cllr Keith Glazier; Colonel Anthony Kimber – RNP Coordinator; Jane Brook and Sarah Broadbent – Rye & District Chamber of Commerce; James Stewart and Peter Connock – Rye News; 41 members of the public.

The meeting commenced at 6.31pm.

119 PRAYERS

These were said by the Town Sergeant, Paul Goring.

120 APOLOGIES

There were none.

121 CODE OF CONDUCT

The following disclosures of interests were made:

Cllr Jonathan Breeds	124	Owner of a business in the BID area
Cllr Boyd	124	Owner of a business in the BID area
Cllr Fiddimore	124	Has a family member employed by a business in the BID area.
Cllr Thorpe	127	Remains a director of Rye Christmas Festival Ltd

In relation to Agenda item 124, the following Members requested dispensations for this meeting only:

Name	Nature of interest	Participation	Reason(s)
Cllr John Breeds	Friends with a business owner in the BID area	Speak & vote	Possible inquoracy, interests of residents.
Cllr Pat Hughes	Friends with a business owner in the BID area	Speak & vote	Possible inquoracy, interests of residents.

Cllr Vagn Hansen	Friends with a business owner in the BID area	Speak & vote	Possible inquoracy.
Cllr Chris Hoggart	Trustee of Rye Heritage Centre and Director of Rye Partnership	Speak & vote	Possible inquoracy.
Cllr Dena Smith Ellis	Friends with a business owner in the BID area	Speak & vote	Possible inquoracy, interests of residents.
Cllr Andi Rivett	Friends with a business owner in the BID area	Speak & vote	Possible inquoracy, interests of residents.
Cllr Andy Stuart	Friends with a business owner in the BID area	Speak & vote	Possible inquoracy, interests of residents.
Cllr Shaun Rogers	Partner owns a business in the BID area	Speak & vote	Possible inquoracy, interests of residents.

All dispensation requests were approved.

The Mayor adjourned the meeting for Mayoral announcements, the report(s) of the District Councillors; the report of the County Councillor and Public Question Time (See Appendix A).

The meeting was reconvened.

122 COUNCIL MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve – as an accurate record – the Draft Minutes of the meetings held on 8 December 2025 (C12) and 22 December 2025 (C13).

123 COMMITTEE MINUTES

RESOLVED to receive and note the Draft Minutes (including any recommendations) of the Planning and Townscape Committee meetings held on 12 January 2026 (PT12).

The Mayor adjourned the meeting for comments from the public in relation to the BID (See Appendix B).

124 PROPOSED RYE BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BID)

Comments from Members included:

- The Town Council is funded by the precept, raised from domestic council tax, which is providing services that benefit businesses.

- There is a potential for businesses to achieve a return on investment from their BID levy contribution that is not possible for residents from their council tax payments.
- The BID would broaden the public realm revenue streams.
- The BID provides a voice for businesses and gives them greater autonomy in relation to issues that affect them.
- Local Government Reorganisation is a threat to services supporting local businesses, however the BID represents an opportunity to raise a pot of money that will remain in Rye.

RESOLVED that Rye Town Council's two votes in the BID ballot be cast in favour.

There were 3 declarations of interest. Of those voting, 11 Members voted in favour, 1 against and 1 abstained.

125 VISITOR LEVY IN ENGLAND CONSULTATION

Members expressed concern that, since this was a proposed new (Strategic) Mayoral power, it was unlikely that money raised in Rye would return to Rye.

RESOLVED to respond to the consultation stating that any visitor levy generated should be spent in the parish/town in which it was raised.

126 UK TOWN OF CULTURE 2028

The Mayor explained that the UK Town of Culture competition offered an opportunity for the winning town to be awarded £3.5 million to help them deliver a cultural programme during the summer of 2028. Shortlisted Towns would receive £60k to help deliver their full bids for the competition. This gives an indication of quite how much work could be involved in preparing for such a process, with no guarantee of success.

The initial requirement is to submit an Expression of Interest by 31 March. A local resident familiar with these types of process has offered to prepare and submit an initial Expression of Interest for Rye.

Cllr Bookless pointed out that next year was Rye Museum's 100th anniversary, which could dovetail with elements of any bid. Members agreed that Rye 'punched above its weight' with cultural events and opportunities already on offer.

RESOLVED To ask David Angell to prepare and submit an Expression of Interest for Rye.

127 RYE CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL STORAGE UNIT

Cllr Thorpe was thanked for all her efforts over the years with Christmas in Rye.

Members noted the (tabled) inventory of the Christmas Festival container's contents.

RESOLVED To accept ownership of the contents of the Christmas Festival storage container (now paid for by RTC).

128 FINANCE

a) Payments

RESOLVED To receive the schedule of Expenses by Supplier (October 2025-December 2025).

b) Budget Monitor

RESOLVED To receive the Budget Monitor to 31 December 2025.

c) Account Balances

RESOLVED To note the account balances as at 31 December 2025.

d) Earmarked Reserves

RESOLVED To note the Earmarked Reserves balances as at 31 December 2025.

129 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 (1)(2), to exclude the press and public from item 130 because it relates to a staff members terms of employment.

130 RECRUITMENT OF TOWN CLERK

The Clerk gave an update. The first round of recruitment had been unsuccessful. The post had been re-advertised, with enhanced publicity.

The Mayor thanked the Clerk for his efforts over the Christmas break in progressing the recruitment of his replacement.

The meeting ended at 8.14pm

Date ..... Chairman .....

Mayoral Announcements

A recent highlight of the Mayoral diary had been meeting the Cubs and Explorers groups at the Town Hall with the Town Crier, where they were shown around, learnt about the history of the Town Hall and held a mock election.

Rother District Council

Cllr McGurk updated that he had convened a Rye Salts Action Group to progress the aims of expanding the use of the Salts and further consider methods for rewilding areas to improve biodiversity. The Smugglers Day in August will be held on the Salts and it is hoped the area could be used for other events in future.

East Sussex County Council

Cllr Glazier is in the process of arranging to meet the Highways Steward in Rye to examine the condition of the pavements, which are poor in places. He urged residents to continue to report potholes via the ES Highways website.

Cllr Glazier went on to explain the budget that ESCC cabinet were currently considering would likely lead to a Financial Support Application being made in light of a £57m predicted shortfall. 76% of the council's budget is spent on older people and looked after children. The draft budget proposes the maximum permitted increase in precept of 4.99%.

Public Question Time

The matter of motorcycle parking on the Strand was raised in relation to the Council's recent decisions regarding a proposed PSPO to address anti-social driving/parking and, separately, to support the Environment Agency if it proceeded to withdraw the motorcycle parking facility at the Strand. Those attending requested Members reconsider these decisions as soon as possible, welcoming further consultation and discussion to try and resolve the issues. They mentioned that the EA had yet to respond to representations made directly.

Cllr Hoggart clarified that Rye welcomed responsible motorcyclists and that the issue of anti-social riding/parking, which prompted the suggestion of a PSPO (similar to that in place in Eastbourne), was separate to the EA's request for the Council's comments on parking on the Strand Quay.

Some members of the public restated that they would like the Council to reconsider its objections to motorcycle parking on Strand Quay. They also stated that anti-social riding was a criminal matter which should be dealt with by the Police and that a PSPO was not an appropriate vehicle for managing such issues.

Another attendee suggested that alternative locations for the motorcyclists to gather could be considered, such as Rye Rugby Club, whereby those visiting could support the club's facilities and enjoy safe, dedicated parking. The pay and display car parks on the other side of the river were also suggested, to ensure the businesses on the Strand continued to benefit.

Cllr McGurk highlighted that the process for RDC to consider a PSPO would involve holding a public consultation before any decision were made.

C14 **APPENDIX B**

Rye Business Improvement District – public adjournment

Matt Breckon, Chair of the Rye BID Task Group and Managing Director of the Kino, read the following statement.

> *We understand that some people in Rye are uncertain about the prospect of a BID. Sadly, misinformation continues to circulate, despite the Task Group making every effort to engage with the business community in the proposed BID area. Councillors have had the chance to meet with the Task Group and have been supplied with the business plan, and our FAQ document all of which makes clear how this could benefit Rye's economy.*
>
> *The business plan has been developed by the Task Group from ideas generated through the consultation process. The Task Group itself reflects both the geography and business sectors within the town with businesses from the High Street, Cinque Ports Street, Station Approach, Mermaid Street, Market Road, Fishmarket Road and Lion Street – covering retail, hospitality, accommodation, grocery, business and service industries.*
>
> *While the Town Council may be aware that there have been some voices in town who are against the idea of a BID, in reality only 61 eligible businesses signed a petition out of a total of nearly 300. On that basis the Task Group concluded that proceeding to ballot is the best way for a democratic decision to be made by the town's businesses as we recognise that many are quietly supportive of the idea.*
>
> *In summary - if voted in - the BID would raise around £90K a year for each of the next 5 years. This is money that could be spent on projects that the business community alone decide - those that will help boost the town's economy, enable collective procurement savings, provide business support, encourage footfall and improve the public realm.*
>
> *The BID represents the most significant opportunity for a change to funding the visitor experience and public realm that Rye has seen in many years or is certainly likely to see in the face of local government reorganisation.*

Councillors should also consider the proven capabilities that Business Improvement Districts have in leveraging further funding. BIDs open the doors to match funding opportunities that are currently closed to us.

We urge Councillors to consider the changing landscape around us - when the new unitary authority comes into power, Rye is in serious risk of losing share of voice - particularly when it comes to the business community. Put simply - post Local Government Reorganisation, Rye will need someone batting for economic regeneration. Without a BID, unless the Town Council takes that role on too, it won't exist. Bexhill has its Neighbourhood Board looking after economic regeneration. Hastings has the Town Board. Rye will have its Town Council alone - with a limited budget and a longer list of responsibilities than ever before.

The BID is our town's chance of resilience in these headwinds, and moreover for businesses in our area to gain a seat at the table where currently they are denied. It is not a stealth tax. It is quite the opposite. It's an investment with a defined set of performance indicators to demonstrate return on investment for those businesses who will be paying into the pot. We have been fortunate enough to have had the BID process paid for by Levelling Up funding, we will unlikely have that chance again, this is an opportunity not a threat.

Sarah Broadbent commented that, in respect of the consultation on a visitor levy (also on the agenda), some had speculated the BID could be redundant should a visitor levy be implemented. She highlighted that this would only be in place by 2029 at the earliest, provided it was approved, and that the money raised may not end up being spent locally. In relation to the Town of Culture 2028 (also on the agenda), this was an example of another type of project the BID may be able to assist with, if an application were pursued.

A member of the public, who owns a holiday let in the town, questioned quite what was proposed by the BID to help a business such as theirs. They also questioned the weighting of the ballot process in favour of businesses with higher rateable values, believing it to be undemocratic, and considered the levy unfair in the face of other financial pressures.

Sarah Broadbent clarified the ballot process, confirming that 51% of eligible businesses voting needed to be in favour first, with a secondary check and balance that any majority in favour also had to represent a majority in rateable value.

In response to questions about how the BID will be structured, what it will do and who will undertake the work, it was confirmed that the current Task Group would form the board of a limited company to run the BID. The opportunity to join the company was open to any levy payers in the BID area that may wish to. With a BID pot of £90k it would likely be uneconomical to employ someone, so it is more likely someone self-employed would be appointed for 1-2 days per week, reporting back to the BID board.

Others commented that Rye already had a thriving tourist trade, and was uniquely, continually busy; that organic growth had been successful in the past and that this could be fragile in the face of interference.

In response to a question about what happens to those who refuse to pay the levy, it was explained that it is administered and collected by the local business rates authority (in this case Rother District Council) and is treated in the same manner as any statutory collection such as business rates.