

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Town Council held at the Town Hall, Rye on
Monday 9 December 2024**

PRESENT Councillors David Bookless, Mike Boyd, John Breeds, Cheryl Creaser, Bernardine Fiddimore, Rebekah Gilbert, Vagn Hansen, Chris Hoggart (**Deputy Mayor**), Pat Hughes, Jo Kirkham, Sue Learoyd Smith, Andi Rivett, Shaun Rogers, Andy Stuart (**Mayor**), Sophie Thorpe

IN ATTENDANCE Richard Farhall - Town Clerk; Paul Goring – Town Sergeant; County Cllr Keith Glazer; Peter Connock – Rye News; Colonel Anthony Kimber – RNP Co-ordinator; Sarah Broadbent – Rye & District Chamber of Commerce; Stephen Cooper – Rye Rugby Club Chairman; 10 other members of the public.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm.

107 PRAYERS

These were said by the Mayor's Chaplain, The Reverend Paul White.

108 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence – and the reason as lodged with the Clerk – were accepted from Cllr Willy Everett.

109 CODE OF CONDUCT

The disclosures of interests following were made:

Cllr Creaser	113	RDC Planning Committee member
Cllr Gilbert	116	Allotment plot holder
Cllr Hansen	116	RSUAG member and plot holder
	<i>Adj (if Leisure Centre raised)</i>	Treasurer, RR&W CIO
Cllr Hughes	116	Rye Amenity CIC Director (former allotments manager)
Cllr Kirkham	111	Rye Castle Museum Director (has toilet in the Gungardens block)
Cllr Learoyd Smith	111	Spouse has an allotment plot
Cllr Rivett	111	Allotment plot holder

The Mayor adjourned the meeting for Mayoral announcements, the Report(s) of the District Councillors; the Report of the County Councillor; the appointment of the Mayor Elect 2025-26 – and Public Question Time (See APPENDIX).

The meeting reconvened.

RESOLVED 1 To bring forward consideration of item 113.

RESOLVED 2 To suspend the Standing Orders requiring Members to stand when speaking – and not to speak more than once (unless proposing a resolution).

113 RYE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Members noted the summary of Regulation 14 consultation responses and were invited to approve the latest version of the [Rye Neighbourhood Plan](#) (incorporating the Reg 14 representations), before it was submitted to Rother District Council for consideration, prior to the Regulation 18 consultation.

The item was introduced by the RNP Co-ordinator, Colonel Kimber:

The RNP is now 5 years old and is due for review. The public (Reg 14) consultation took place 15 October 2024 to 26 November 2024 – and the (anonymised) representations have been published. Detailed responses were received from ESCC, RDC and Southern Water.

The text highlighted in red within the amended Plan represents proposed changes to the original ‘made’ Plan.

Key comments from those who responded include:

- (On allocated sites) The density of new builds should be higher.
- RDC is under pressure from Central Government to increase its annual housing target by 200. The Government is pressing for maximum growth – advising that it expects that any residential building proposal that conforms with the Local District and relevant NP should be approved.
- RTC’s site allocations are generally accepted in the HEELA.
- RDC Planning Strategy has requested a more detailed discussion about housing numbers in January.
- Given the extent of land that is protected – or a flood risk - it would be a serious challenge if RDC asked Rye to find additional allocation sites.
- Both RDC and ESCC seem to be pressing for greater housing density and less associated parking. (Colonel Kimber has explained that less parking is not a practicable proposition in Rye.)
- Although it is undertaking a piece of work jointly with HBC, RDC’s latest RNP comments do not mention second homes, nor short-term holiday lets.
- The emerging new Rother District Local Plan recognises that Rye is a provider of services for surrounding parishes.
- RDC and ESCC have submitted few comments on specific sites in Rye.
- Both appear to be happy to drop the provision for a petrol station and convenience store on the former Freda Gardham School site. They support the provision of EVCPs at the front of the site (B3) – but there is currently no adequate power supply.
- Rye Cricket Club has submitted a proposal which, if approved, would see the storage sheds demolished and replaced with a structure providing residential accommodation over, and storage for grounds maintenance purposes, under.
- The value of the Strategic Gap has been emphasised with both RDC and ESCC.
- None of the comments submitted would alter the existing RNP policies significantly.

- RDC and ESCC would like to see more content included relevant to climate change.

The Mayor adjourned the meeting for comments from members of the public. These included:

In relation to the eviction notices served by Martello, the New Road Artists – and The Studio – had received relatively little support from the Rye Creative Centre CIC. The only plan on the table now is Martello's desire to provide some artist accommodation on the Strategic Gap – albeit, ancillary to a (contentious) housing development. However, the proposal would accommodate a limited number of displaced artists and there would be no space for running classes. Also, assuming planning consent was obtained, it could be some years before the new accommodation was available. The licencees have been advised by Martello that they are unlikely to be required to move out the RCC before June 2025.

RX Architects had advised that if artist accommodation was provided at the front of the existing site (B3), there would be space for 6-8 large studios only – including some parking.

Jonathon Bennett stated that he had calculated that B3 could provide 400-500sqm of accommodation.

The meeting reconvened.

Comments from Members included:

- Because of tax changes, second homes are returning to the open market – potentially freeing up accommodation for local people. Smaller properties could be ideal for those working in the hospitality sector.
- 'Returning property' is unlikely to be affordable.
- Rye needs homes that are affordable for local people – thereby supporting local businesses.
- RDC does not need more executive-style homes.
- Fly-tipping – and an abandoned caravan – remain on the Lower School site.
- Effective action against the proliferation of second homes and short-term holiday lets (such as AirBNBs) requires primary legislation.
- Wages in Rother tend to be low. 'Affordable' rents need to reflect average local wage rates.
- Rother has the lowest average household income in the South-East.
- It is expected that the Government will ask RDC to ensure 880 new dwellings a year are provided.
- There are 8.9m homes in the UK with 2 or more bedrooms unoccupied.

Colonel Kimber commented further:

- There needs to be a conversation with RDC Strategic Planners about housing mix.
- RDC's new housing target figure is unknown.
- Rye's physical and environmental constraints must be kept to the fore.

The Mayor advised that he had a number of suggestions for minor amendments to the (revised) RNP – and that he would forward these to Colonel Kimber.

RESOLVED To approve the 'post Reg 14' version of the RNP.

Colonel Kimber, Clerk

RESOLVED To bring forward consideration of item 113.

112 FREDA GARDHAM PLAYING FIELD

Council was asked to consider a request from Rye Ruby FC for a lease 'extension' to enable it to apply for funding towards improving the facilities for all users.

With the permission of the meeting, the Club Charman, Stephen Cooper explained that the Club is looking to improve its facilities but most grant funders require the applicant to have more than 10 years of any lease remaining. The current underlease with RTC expires in 2029.

The Clerk explained that, whilst it was not possible to extend the current underlease by way of a deed of variation, with the approval of the freeholder (ESCC), RTC could agree a reversionary lease with the Club – effectively, agreeing a new lease well in advance.

RESOLVED To proceed to agree a further 25-year underlease with the Club, effective upon the expiry of the current underlease. Clerk

RESOLVED To bring forward consideration of item 116.

116 ALLOTMENTS

a) Service Level Agreement

The Rye Allotments Forum (RAF) invited the Council to approve the draft Service Level Agreement with the Rye Allotment Society (merger of the Rye Allotments Association and Rye South Undercliff Allotments Group from 1.1.25).

RESOLVED To approve the Draft Service Level Agreement. Clerk

b) Rye South Undercliff Allotments Groups (RSUAG)

The Clerk advised that, from 2018, RSUAG received a management fee of £420pa from the Rye Amenity CIC.

RAF asked the Council to consider paying RSUAG the sum of £315 to cover the period April-Dec 2024.

RESOLVED To approve the request. Clerk

111 PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

Chamber Levelling-Up Grant Sarah Broadbent (SB) reported that, because of the number of interested parties involved, RDC Legal Services considers it does not have the capacity to draft and execute, by 31.3.25, a suitable legal agreement to enable the £25k to be spent on refurbishing the Station Approach conveniences during 2025-26.

Because the £25k needs to be spent/defrayed by 31 March, the Chamber is now exploring alternative uses for the funding and would like to continue to work with RDC officers.

The Clerk reported that:

- a) Because of performance issues, RTC had appointed Lodestar Cleaning to take over the cleaning of the Strand Quay and Gungardens pcs from Wettons, provisionally with effect from 6.1.25. Costs are comparable.
- b) RDC is seeking interest from businesses who might be interested in using any of 14 pcs across Rother for commercial purposes – albeit whilst offering 1-3 publicly-accessible wcs. RDC has stated that it remains open to approaches from parish councils interested in acquiring pcs by way of free/leasehold. RDC expects to receive an annual rental payment – plus a percentage of turnover.

In relation to b), comments from Members included:

- Given the conversion, rent and turnover contribution costs, there is likely be little interest.
- The pcs 'on offer' in Rye are small.
- RDC's agent, Dyer & Hobbis, has described the Rye facilities as 'former toilets' – which disregards completely the money and effort RTC has invested in two of them.
- RDC's Head of Estates has suggested that RDC's Station Approach lease with Network Rail could be assigned to RDC by April 2026.
- RTC and the Chamber could establish a CIC to run the Station Approach pcs.

SB advised that she believed Bexhill Town Council had found it relatively easy to be assigned Network Rail's Devonshire Square conveniences.

Cllrs Hansen and Learoyd Smith both thanked the Chamber for its work on trying to improve the Station Approach pcs.

RESOLVED To seek a meeting with the Leader of RDC to press for a solution to the LUP Station Approach proposal 'legal blockage'.

Clerk

Speaking from the Gallery, the owner of Strand Fish & Chips stated that businesses appreciate public conveniences being open because of the number of non-customers that, otherwise, try and use their facilities.

The Mayor adjourned the meeting to allow the Rye Recreation & Wellbeing Treasurer, Cllr Hansen to provide an update on the transfer of the Leisure Centre.

He reported that the CIO was on track to raising £250k – with £159k actually raised. This represented a considerable achievement by the community.

Trustees are focusing on preparing for the 1 April handover. Dan Lynn has been appointed as the Centre Manager and will work alongside Freedom Leisure Jan-March.

RTC is still waiting for the draft head lease (which it will need in order to draft the sub lease with the CIO).

This evening, RDC's cabinet is expected to sign off the transfer.

The pv panels funded by the Sport England grant should be installed by 31 December.

Staff will be 'TUPE'd' from Freedom Leisure to the CIO.

A specification for the £550k Levelling Up funding had been completed.

The CIO is intending to give RTC a twice-yearly progress report.

On behalf of RTC, the Mayor thanked all those who had been involved with the proposed transfer.

The meeting reconvened.

110 COUNCIL MINUTES

RESOLVED To approve – as an accurate record - the Draft Minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2024 (C12).

114 MEETINGS: REMOTE ATTENDANCE AND PROXY VOTING CONSULTATION
Members were invited to consider the Clerk's draft response.

RESOLVED Subject to the amendments, below, to submit the draft response.

***Amendment 1* To emphasise that it should be up to individual councils to decide which, of the proposed new power/s, to apply.**

***Amendment 2* To change the suggested response to Q5 from 'less than 10%' to 'more than 10% but less than 50%'. Clerk**

115 FINANCE

a) Expenditure

RESOLVED To receive and note the Expenses by Supplier Report, August-October 2024.

b) Budget Monitor

RESOLVED To receive and note the monitor as at 31 October 2024.

Cllr Hoggart asked if an additional column could be included in the budget reports, showing forecast income/expenditure as a percentage against budget.

c) Account Balances

RESOLVED To receive and note the Account Balances as at 31 October 2024.

d) Earmarked Reserves

RESOLVED To receive and note the Earmarked Reserves as at 31 October 2024.

The meeting ended at 8.08pm

Date Chairman

Mayoral Announcements

The Mayor's Report included reference to attending:

- The Remembrance Sunday Service
- The Mary Stanford Memorial Service
- The East Guldeford Church Angel Frieze Dedication
- St Michael Hospice's Light of Hope
- The Lighting of the Tree at TGCC
- Christmas in Rye

He thanked all those involved with the Christmas Festival – including erecting the lights – particularly Councillor Thorpe – as well as Neil Cunliffe, who travelled down from Lowestoft to help on 7 December.

Rother District Council

Cllr Creaser's report included:

- It will be a challenge to make provision for RDC's commitments in the 2025-26 Budget.
- Homelessness is still a major issue – however, RDC has managed to get the number on the waiting list down to 500.
- As a Member of the Planning Committee she needs to ensure that decisions are guided by planning law and regulations (rather than emotion).
- She is a member of group tasked with examining RDC's adherence to standards.

East Sussex County Council

Cllr Glazier's report included:

- A sizeable pot hole at the end of Rope Walk had been repaired to a high standard but, for some reason, debris had been left in the vicinity. The Highways Steward is following this up.
- To bring the County's road network up to standard would cost £300m.
- ESCC has received a technical note from Government, indicating the likely level of Government funding for 2025-26. The Government would be reimbursing principal authorities for additional employers NICs from April – but not their main contractors. Next April's minimum wage increase will have a significant impact on payroll costs.
- The settlement figure for 2025-26 is expected on 19 December – and then ESCC has 5 weeks to finalise a draft budget.
- The number of older people resident in the county continues to rise. 26% of the population is over 65 years of age; 5% is over 85.
- 76% of ESCC's expenditure is on social care. The cost of providing this has risen by 40% over the last 3 years – the Government has covered 28% of this.
- Currently, ESCC is unable to draft a balanced budget for 2025-26 – and so it may have to reduce some services.
- Staggeringly, it costs ESCC £28m pa to take 5,000 young people to/from school – and the forecast overspend is £4m.

Cllr Fiddimore observed that Rye has two pending planning applications that include accommodation specifically for older people – and suggested that their (generally) higher health, care and medical needs need to be taken into account when such applications are determined.

Mayor Elect 2025-26 *(Clerk in the Chair)*

Cllr Boyd proposed – and Cllr Creaser seconded – Cllr Stuart.

There being no other nominations, Cllr Stuart was declared to have been appointed.

Public Question Time

Members were minded to support item 113 being brought forward (including the meeting being adjourned again for any public contributions).