

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Town Council held at the Town Hall, Rye on
Monday 27 January 2025**

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

IN ATTENDANCE Richard Farhall - Town Clerk; Jessica Neame – Deputy Town Clerk; Paul Goring – Town Sergeant; County Cllr Keith Glazier; James Stuart – Rye News; Colonel Anthony Kimber – RNP Co-ordinator; Sarah Broadbent & Jane Brook – Rye & District Chamber of Commerce; Stephen Cooper – Rye Rugby Club Chairman; Donna Lake & Graham Ellis – TGRA; Sheila Davison – Rye Harbour Sailability; 4 other members of the public.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm.

117 PRAYERS

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

118 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence – and the reasons as lodged with the Clerk – were accepted from Cllrs John Breeds and Jo Kirkham.

119 CODE OF CONDUCT

Cllr Creaser observed that a number of agenda items relate to Rother District. She advised that, as a Member of RDC, she would declare an interest as and when it was appropriate.

6.31pm 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).

6.59pm The meeting reconvened.

120 COUNCIL MINUTES

To approve - and to authorise the Chairman to sign - the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2024 (C13).

121 GRANT APPLICATIONS

Members were invited to consider the applications below.

The Clerk advised that the General Grants Fund balance was £89. However, he could identify £500 from another budget.

- a) **Tilling Green Residents' Association** £1,000 towards a 'Welcome' sign and three noticeboards.

The TGRA Vice-Chairman, Graham Ellis (GE) spoke to the application – highlighting:

- The welcome sign and noticeboards would help to foster a sense of pride of place.
- The proposed locations for the noticeboards are: outside the shops; Ferry Road-Marley Road footpath; Tillingham Court flats.

Members' comments included:

- Both TGRA and Sailability are worthwhile organisations.
- Local government re-organisation will place RTC under significantly increased financial pressure.
- The applications could be considered further when the Grants budget is 'replenished' in the new financial year.
- Tilling Green used to have a strong sense of community.
- The (reinvigorated) TGRAA is doing well and community-building should be encouraged.
- If RTC does but not fund either applicant other funders could follow suit if they are reluctant to fund applications that appear to lack the support of the local council.
- Residents of Tilling Green need to be reassured that the area in which they live is no less important than other areas of the town.

RESOLVED To award a grant of £500 now – and to consider contributing a further £500 in the new financial year. Clerk

b) Rye Harbour Sailability £1,000 towards the purchase of a Wheelyboat.

The RHS Vice-Chair, Sheila Davison advised that she was happy for RTC to defer consideration of her application until the new financial year – RHS is not aiming to purchase the Wheelyboat until April 2026.

RHS has been running for 8 years. It is all about breaking down barriers and getting disabled adults out on to the water. Currently it is difficult to accommodate wheelchair users. Wheelyboats can take two users at a time. RHS needs to raise £25,000.

Comments included:

- Most of RHS's volunteers are locals.
- Determination of the application could be deferred until the new financial year.

Members were minded to award a grant.

RESOLVED To re-consider the application in the new financial year.

122 FRED A GARDHAM PLAYING FIELD

The Clerk advised that the annual rent paid by Rye Rugby FC is due for its (5-yearly) review in February 2025. It has been £500pa since the underlease between RTC and the Club commenced in February 2005.

The Club Chairman, Stephen Cooper, reminded Members that the Club is working on a 5-year plan to improve the site facilities – which will ensure also that Rye United FC can continue to utilise them. A rent freeze would be appreciated.

The Clerk confirmed that the underlease stipulates that the rent reviews must be carried out every 5 year – thereby, ruling out annual reviews. It was noted that improvements could generate more revenue for the Club.

RESOLVED To freeze the rent at £500pa for the next five years. Clerk

123 PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

Sarah Broadbent (SB) reported that, regrettably – and after 10 months of trying - using the Chamber's £25k of capital Levelling Up funding to (partly) refurbish the Station Approach pcs is not now a realistic proposition. Following a recent vote of Chamber members, it was decided to utilise the grant to fund an AI visitor information resource, delivered via WhatsApp. This does not mean that the Chamber is no longer interested in improving Rye's public conveniences. It remains keen to see the Station Approach pcs refurbished.

Cllr Hansen thanked the Chamber for its considerable efforts to direct its LUP funding to improving Rye's public conveniences offer. He raised the possibility that the conveniences could be transferred to RTC as part of the re-organisation of local government.

Cllr Gilbert suggested that RDC should be told that, because of its procrastination, £25k has been 'lost' for improving the Station Approach pcs.

124 RDC LEADER MEETING

Members were invited to agree three RTC representatives to attend a meeting with RDC's Leader, CEO and two Cabinet Members on Friday 14 February, 11am-noon, at the Town Hall, Bexhill.

The Clerk advised that a couple of similar meetings were held, remotely, during the pandemic. RTC's representation could be the same - Mayor, Deputy Mayor & Clerk. This was **AGREED**.

RDC is proposing that the meeting would be repeated every other month (online/in person).

125 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2025

RESOLVED To note that this will be held on Thursday 6 March, at Tilling Green Community Centre and to make the proceedings less formal and more interactive by:

- **Allowing attendees to register from 6.30-7pm - and to have until 7.30pm to chat with Councillors, staff and invited stallholders (provisionally the Town Steward Service, Rye Recreation & Wellbeing CIO, Rye Neighbourhood Plan and Rye Heritage Centre).**
 - **Starting the formal business at 7.30pm – with a shortened Mayor's overview of the year - and then Public Questions/Comments (up to 9pm).**
- Clerk**

126 DRAFT BUDGET AND PRECEPT 2025-26

The Clerk summarised the Draft Budget – advising that the unknowns around the proposed re-organisation of local government in Sussex had made forecasting RTC's future resource needs very difficult.

Cllr Hansen appreciated that some provision needed to be made for the possibility of the Rye Recreation & Wellbeing CIO failing – but considered that this was unlikely. He would prefer that the precept did not increase but recognised that RTC needed to be prepared for whatever opportunities local government re-organisation would bring.

RESOLVED To approve the Draft Budget 2025-26 and to agree that the precept for 2025-26 shall be £284,883. Clerk

127 DEVOLUTION

RESOLVED 1 To ask the Clerk to draft terms of reference for a Local Government Re-organisation and Devolution Working Group. Clerk

RESOLVED 2 To consider, at the next meeting, abolishing the Public Conveniences and Devolved Services Working Groups – and incorporating their memberships into the new Working Group. Clerk

128 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

In accordance with the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 (1)(2), to exclude the public and press from item 129 on the grounds that it entails consideration of amendments to terms of employment.

129 FLEXIBLE RETIREMENT AND ADDITIONAL HOURS REQUESTS

Members considered:

- (a) The Clerk's request to partially retire – provisionally with effect from 1.7.25 – by reducing his weekly hours from 37 to 27 a week.
- (b) The Deputy Clerk's request that her weekly hours be increased from 27 to 37 a week from the same date.

It was noted that a) would result in no additional (strain) cost to RTC and that a) and b) combined would result in a small reduction in RTC's total payroll cost (reflected in the 2025-26 Budget) from the effective date.

RESOLVED To agree the requests. Clerk

The meeting ended at 7.54pm

Date Chairman

Mayoral Announcements

The Mayor advised that he did not have a lot to report because he had been away for a number of weeks. However, the lead up to Christmas had been busy.

He had been persuaded to appear in one of the pantos and thanked the Deputy Mayor for attending a meeting of the Cinque Port Mayors and the Lord Warden in London.

Rother District Council

Cllr Creaser advised that it a relatively quiet time of the year for RDC.

RDC's CEO had presented on the subject of the (likely) local government re-organisation at last week's RALC meeting. The implications for parish/town councils is currently unclear. Larger (unparished) towns could, potentially, become town councils.

Devolution was discussed at last Monday's OSC meeting. There had been many - especially in relation to the Northiam GP surgery car park - responses to the consultation on charging for (currently) free RDC car parks. The OSC recommended that the charging proposed should not proceed. Other than this, the OSC was happy with the Draft RDC Budget 2025-26.

East Sussex County Council

Cllr Glazier's reported that Cabinet would be considering ESCC's Draft 2025-26 Budget tomorrow. The only way to create a balanced budget is to utilise earmarked reserves. ESCC will need to levy the maximum permitted Council Tax rise of 4.99%.

The increases in employer NICs and the National Living wage have cancelled out the settlement increase.

On 16.12.24 the Government launched the Devolution Bill. Local authorities were given until 10.1.25 to register interest in the priority programme (which attracts Government financial support). It is a matter of 'when' rather than 'if'.

The Government is seeking to abolish two tiers of local government – districts/boroughs and counties – replacing them with unitary authorities. Each unitary must serve a population of at least 500,000. East Sussex qualifies by virtue of having a population of 570,000.

A new strategic authority (based on The Yorkshire model) is proposed – lead by a directly-elected 'light touch' Mayor – which would sit above East Sussex UA, West Sussex UA and (the existing) Brighton & Hove UA. Its combined population would be £1.5m.

To avoid having to induct new Members for two-year terms, it is proposed that the May 2025 County Council elections will be cancelled. The new Sussex Mayor would be in place by May 26 – with unitary authority elections in May 2027.

Cllr Learoyd Smith highlighted the problem of drivers parking on pavements and obstructing the passage of footway users. She had reported a regular occurrence of this to East Sussex Highways. It had replied, stating that it had no enforcement powers on footways and obstruction should be reported to the Police via Operation Crackdown. However, if you do

this you are advised that ESCC can make a TRO to stop parking on (specified) pavements – thereby allowing the East Sussex Parking Team to take enforcement action.

Cllr Glazier asked Cllr Learoyd Smith to forward to him her correspondence with Highways. Making TROs is a lengthy process, costing £tens of thousands.

Cllr Rivett was under the impression that parking on pavements is illegal. Who is liable if a pedestrian has to step into the road to avoid a parked car – and is injured? He added that there are now so many pot holes nobody has time to report them.

Cllr Glazier responded that resource considerations mean that pot holes meeting the intervention criteria only are repaired. Although there are stretches of carriageway with many holes in close proximity, it may be that just one meets the criteria. He believed that the driver of a vehicle obstructing a pavement is responsible for any accidents this action gave rise to.

Having seen them work well in London, Cllr Gilbert was generally in favour of unitary councils – but considered that a pan Sussex strategic authority would be too large. Additionally, the savings made by abolishing the districts/boroughs would be absorbed by the strategic authority.

Cllr Hansen observed that devolution is associated with services being delivered by those at a more local level. What was being proposed appears to be the opposite.

Cllr Glazier advised that the Devolution White Paper mentions parish councils 2-3 times. There needs to be a conversation about their role in the re-organisation. Until re-organisation is complete, services will continue to be delivered as they are now.

Public Question Time

Rye Neighbourhood Plan The RNP Co-ordinator, Colonel Kimber (AK) asked Members to note:

- On 9.12.24, RTC considered the responses to the Reg14 consultation and submitted the amended RNP to RDC.
- After some discussion, RDC accepted the revision for the Reg 16 consultation (deadline for representations: 7.3.24).
- The Reg 16 version is on RTC's web site – but may be accessed via RDC's site.
- RDC is looking to appoint an examiner. AK had asked that the previous examiner, John Slater be approached.
- If the examiner takes the view that the changes proposed are relatively minor, no referendum will be required.
- RDC has been insisting that the Plan should run until 2028 – however, AK is pressing for at least 2030.