

PRESENTATION BY KEVIN BOORMAN, MANAGER, 1066 COUNTRY CAMPAIGN

Immediately prior to the commencement of the meeting Kevin and his colleagues distributed to Members Hastings & 1066 Country promotional packs.

Kevin Boorman (KB) advised that the 1066 Campaign had been formed in March 1993. Prior to this Rother District Council had promoted its District separately. Given additional funding – and support - from the SE England Tourist Board it made sense to combine the efforts of Rother and Hastings.

1066 covers Hastings, Rother and approx 25% of Wealden (Herstmonceux and Pevensey). It is a branded product. A number of the towns and villages within its beneficial area have definable links – for example, Hastings Old Town, Rye and Battle have similar timber framed buildings. Battle and Bodiam have historical sites over 900 years old. There are also a range of significant publicly-accessible gardens within the area.

1066 produces considerable amounts of promotional material – including a full colour ‘coffee table’ guide and ‘attractions’ material in Spanish, Flemish, German and French.

The Campaign’s budget is c £120,000pa – with Rother DC and Hastings BC each contributing £50,000; however, Hastings provides greater officer time and a subsidised print/design service. Other funders include English Heritage, the National Trust and Wealden DC. One of its key target groups is journalists. ‘Targeted’ visitors are principally ‘DINKIES’ (dual-income, no kids) and older people with disposable income and an interest in history. Research has shown that the ‘1066’ and ‘Battle of Hastings’ are recognised internationally.

The organisation is guided by an Executive Board with an independent chairman.

Cllr Souster considered that the 1066 brand was a successful one and emphasised that it had never been Rye TC’s intention to break away from it. However, a number of councilors did consider that more could be made of Rye’s long-established (eastern) links with other Cinque Ports and Romney Marsh.

KB responded that 1066 had considerable involvement with the Confederation of the Cinque Ports. It was currently updating the Confederation’s promotional leaflet and had produced the Cinque Ports Cycle Tour guide. That said, research suggested that those outside Kent and Sussex tended not to be aware of the Cinque Ports.

Cllr Potter observed that the material produced by the Campaign centred on five key towns and wondered whether all benefited equally from 1066’s budget. KB responded that although Hastings BC contributed the most in terms of funding and staff resources, it did not get even 50% of the benefit. The main promotional guide is arranged by ‘theme’ rather than town/ village.

Speaking from the Public Gallery, Sara Nixon advised that she had worked with 1066 in the past and it considered it represented good value for Rye. Kerry de Courcy agreed, praised the professionalism of KB – and added that the publicity material would be considerably more expensive if it was not produced in-house by Hastings BC. He stressed that it was important to continue to market additionally each town separately. KB responded by stating that there was a team of people behind the 1066 Campaign.

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

George Shackleton commended the two District Councillors who had spoken recently against the Udimore Road outline planning application.

George Shackleton *Given that it was now 10-12 months since he had last asked the Town Council to do something about the lack of progress developing the former Central Garage site – and that it appeared the Council had not put any pressure on Rother DC – would the Council now act?*

The Mayor reiterated that the Town Council had little influence because the site was owned privately; however, he had met the owner recently at a Mayoral Engagement and ascertained that new architects had been appointed and that a revised planning application would be submitted to Rother's Planning Committee by the end of November. Cllr Russell advised that the application had now been received by Rother and would be considered by the Planning Committee in January. The new application was unlikely to be radically different from the previous application; however, he understood that the main entrance had been re-located.

REPORT OF THE COUNTY COUNCILLOR

New Primary School Cllr Glazier advised that a 1-week construction 'slippage' had now been recovered. A problem which needed to be resolved before the school opened was that of customers of the Thursday Market parking at the Sports Centre.

Deadman's Lane There was no political will to make the lane one-way out of Rye and he suggested that the majority of local people preferred to use it to come into the town. However, consultation was ongoing.

Responding to a question put by Cllr Hall, Cllr Glazier advised that, following the completion of the new school there would be more – not fewer – parking spaces within the Sports Centre car park. Cllr Fiddimore added that she had alerted County to the 'Thursday parking problem' before construction commenced but had not received a reply.

REPORT OF THE ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCILLORS

Cllr David Russell

Council Russell read from his written report (*see Appendix C*).

Cllr Sonia Holmes

Christmas Lights Cllr Holmes thanked Sara Nixon for organising Rye's Christmas Lights.

AiRS RDC was intending to enter into another Service Level Agreement with Action in Rural Sussex (which provides support to rural parishes/communities).

Military Road This would be re-opened by 15 November.

Speaking from the Gallery, Sara Nixon advised that she had not been involved in organising this year's Rye Christmas Festival – a committee had been established for this purpose.

The Mayor advised that the *Politics Show* had contacted him last week for his views on the De La Warr Pavilion.

Responding to a question from Cllr Souster, Cllr Holmes advised that she was uncertain how much Rother DC had contributed this year to Rye's Christmas Lights. Cllr Souster advised that the Rye Partnership would be contributing a total of £1,500 which he believed would match RDC's contribution.

71c) RYE PARTNERSHIP: PETITION

Keith Taylor – one of the signatories to the covering letter – commended the Partnership Chairman for acknowledging that mistakes had been made and advised that many of those signing the petition had been concerned about the fate of the Town Manager. He suggested that there were considerably more residents dissatisfied with areas of the Partnership than the petition suggested and there was widespread concern about its relationship with the Town Council. It appeared that the Partnership – rather than the elected Town Council - was running aspects of Rye and this needed to be reviewed.

The Mayor suggested that the Rye Partnership was the most successful regeneration Partnership within Rother. The Battle Partnership now largely distributed small grants and the Bexhill Partnership had failed. It remained the case that partnerships are able to access funding not available to parish/town councils. The Partnership had successfully secured £1.6m of Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) monies – all of which had to be match funded.

Cllr Potter observed that the Partnership is a legal entity in its right and that the majority of Town Councillors did not hold directorships of it.

Cllr Bantick suggested there had been disquiet about the Partnership over many years. Previously, RDC's Head of Regeneration had acted also as Partnership Secretary – which created conflicts of interest. From the time of the Partnership's formation it was criticised for its undemocratic nature. It had been claimed previously that the Partnership was responsible for securing £12.5m for projects in Rye and District. There had been a lack of clarity about its financial management. Because of its impending incorporation, no election of officers had taken place at the AGM held in November 2003. At the January 2005 AGM, those attending had been presented with a set of unaudited accounts. There appears to be no record of how its funds have been spent over the last 10 years. Although dismissed by his employer, the former Secretary was re-engaged by the Partnership as a consultant. RDC still funds the Partnership but the relationship between the two is complex.

Before proceeding Cllr Bantick re-stated his personal interest in the material following by virtue of his position as Secretary of the Friends of the Rye Library:

Despite little consultation, the Partnership's ambitious £1.5m plan for the former Central Garage site – which would have involved RDC, Hastings College, ESCC Library Services and Rother Homes renting space – fell through because the Partnership was unable to raise the capital necessary, even though it had spent £90,000 clearing the site. The project was referred to SeaSpace which decided subsequently that it was not commercially viable. It was left to the County Library Service to negotiate with the freeholder of the site for minimum library space. It was questionable whether it was appropriate for the Partnership to try and take on the role of property developer. The Partnership has largely been kept afloat by the District Council. More recently, local fishermen objected to Partnership plans to change Rye Fisheries into general light industrial units and the Planning Authority agreed that building should continue to be used for fish processing. There was concern also about the loss of the Town Manager and there is a lack of communication and accountability. Although the Partnership had initiated some admirable projects some poor decisions had been made. An independent inquiry would go some way towards addressing public dissatisfaction.

Cllr Souster responded that the necessary funding had been in place to develop the Central Garage site but the project was effectively rendered unviable when two of the prospective tenants – Hastings College and Rother Homes – withdrew their interest. Cllr Souster resigned from the Partnership shortly afterwards and returned subsequently on the condition that the structure and organisation of it would be reviewed. He proceeded to explain how that Rye Partnership came to be formed: Partnerships were established in Bexhill and Battle in 1996 after the Government had made it clear that future funding would be distributed via regeneration partnerships rather than local authorities. In February 1997 RDC's CEO and Head of Regeneration brought together interested parties to considering forming a partnership in Rye – the first formal meeting of which took place on 3 April 1997. All three tiers of local government were represented as well as the business sector and education. Following the 1997 General Election membership was expanded to include community groups and adjoining Parishes. Initially, the Partnership organised itself by way of working groups – Regeneration (which never 'found its feet'); Education and Skills; Community and Tourism. The Partnership bid, successfully, for £1.64m to be spent over 7 years.

Cllr Souster added that quarterly returns for each project had to be submitted – via the Accountable Body (RDC) - to the SE England Development Agency (SEEDA). A Power Point presentation, explaining the history, organisation and funding of the Partnership – is available to all. Referring to the opening paragraph of the letter accompanying the petition, he suggested that the assertion that the Partnership had 'lacked achievement over most of its existence' demonstrated a lack of research on the part of the organisers. No money could be drawn down for the many projects without the agreement of both SEEDA and RDC – which scrutinised also Annual Delivery Plans. He highlighted the Rye Community Chest which distributed £60,000pa to small local community groups over a two-year period.

Cllr Hall observed that, whilst canvassing prior to the May elections, it had not been uncommon for people to express concerns about the Partnership. There appeared to be a degree of mistrust. Ian Foster had approached her complaining that the Rye & District Bonfire Society had received little of £10,000 promised to it over a 2-year period and, despite, representations, he had received no satisfactory explanation. She highlighted also the Partnership's out-of-date web site.

Speaking from the Gallery, Kerry de Courcy, previously Deputy Chairman of the Partnership, considered that the Partnership had achieved much and stated that it had never set out to run the town. He queried the accuracy of parts of Cllr Bantick's contribution to the debate but expressed some sympathy with the view that the Partnership's public relations side was lacking.

Cllr Glazier invited Cllr Bantick to send a copy of his submission to the Partnership for a full reply. The Partnership had levered in many £m for the town. Its assets included the Cinque Ports Street Office and the Rye Harbour Stores (and flats). If the Partnership was wound up at any time these assets would be given to the town. Its finances are subjected to regular audits.

Suzanne Drew stated that her family's business had been trying to sign a lease with the Partnership since September 2004. Cllr Glazier responded that it would be inappropriate to comment on this particular case because both parties had engaged legal advisers. He expressed his disappointment that Cllr Bantick – and others – had given little recognition to the Partnership's achievements. He conceded that the Partnership's handling of the Central Garage site development had not been helpful. He was keen to ensure a good attendance at future Partnership AGMs and requested guidance on the best day/time.

Mr Lees suggested it was easy to understand how the Partnership had gained a reputation. He acknowledged that it had done some good things for the town but there remained a 'groundswell of discontent'. He understood that there had been some problems during the Partnership's 'early days'.

Cllr Glazier advised that certain people had asked SEEDA to investigate the Partnership but that it had declined. As 'Accountable Body' for much of the Partnership's existence, RDC would be able to provide supporting financial information. He was confident that the Partnership's procedures were robust.

Christopher Strangeways reported that the Farmers' Market had been a beneficiary of Partnership funding but considered that issues of accountability needed to be addressed. It was preferable for elected councilors to be responsible for business undertaken by the Partnership.

Mary Smith added her support for an inquiry.

Keith Taylor advised the meeting that some years ago he had met with the District Auditor (Audit Commission). No accounts could be found for the early years of the Partnership. Kerry de Courcy suggested this was because the then Town Clerk was responsible for the (limited) monies held at the time – records would have been maintained by the Town Council

George Shackleton suggested there was little to be gained by re-visiting the past. He recalled asking the then RDC Regeneration Manager on a number of occasions why there was no partnership in Rye. An informal committee was established, arising from a meeting between the Head of Regeneration and the Rye Chamber of Commerce. Rye TC held c£26,000 which was earmarked for Rye Town Initiative projects. He was concerned that the Town Council's representatives (along with those from other member organisations) had no real influence over the Partnership. Cllr Souster recalled that the first meeting to discuss setting up a partnership was held in the back room of the Ypres Castle Inn..

Sara Nixon stated that she resigned as a Partnership Director because it was dominated by one or two 'controlling' individuals and she considered a number of the decisions made were not in the town's best interests. The original (SRB) programme had worked well; however, the Central Garage site and Rye Fisheries were complex projects, beyond the Partnership's capabilities. The last two consultants engaged by the Partnership had not brought in additional monies (a key part of their brief). Cllr Glazier agreed that the first of these consultants had not provided value for money; however, the second had been instrumental in securing the successful Market Towns programme.