

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There was none.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct and Standing Orders, Cllr Russell re-stated his prejudicial interest in agenda item 117b) and made the comments following in relation to it: the Rye Fisheries refurbishment project is an important one for the town. If the Town Council can be seen to support it by way of a financial contribution this will trigger the release of funds from larger authorities.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct and Standing Orders, Cllr Kirkham re-stated his prejudicial interest in agenda item 117b) and made the comments following in relation to it: the second phase of the Fisheries project would see the creation of a visitor interpretation centre and fishermen's training facility – currently lacking on the south coast. Skills and educational attainment for Rye residents are in the bottom 20% nationally.

REPORT OF THE COUNTY COUNCILLOR

Land north of Udimore Road Cllr Glazier suggested that the recent decision by RDC to delay considering releasing the site from the *Rother District Local Plan* for another 6 months was a positive outcome; however, there was a need to ensure that it was pro-actively seeking alternative brownfield sites in the District.

Redundant school sites On 26 March ESCC would be considering the disposal of the sites following the expected completion of the new Rye Primary Community School in September. He would be pressing for the Tilling Green site to be used for social housing and some form of a community facility. There was no scope for residential development all the while this would be opposed by the Environment Agency on the grounds of the site having no flood protection. Alternative uses would therefore have to be found – with one possibility being leasing it to a community arts organisation.

Southern Water The company's work at Peasmarsh – necessitating a road closure – was continuing to cause considerable inconvenience and financial hardship for local businesses – notably Jempsons.

Cllr Souster advised that Michael Foster MP had written to ESCC asking it to explore the 'Essex Model' in relation to re-opening Post Offices closed under the latest closure programme. Cllr Glazier advised that the County would look into alternative ways of reinstating core postal services but had not yet determined what the Essex proposals actually entailed. KCC is exploring the provision of postal services within its own premises. It costs an estimated £16,000pa to keep a Post Office open.

REPORT OF THE ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCILLORS

Cllr David Russell

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

Responding to a question from Cllr Palmer, Cllr Russell confirmed that the fire-damaged chapel was insured but that there was a £10,000 excess.

The Clerk observed that RDC had not yet commenced the jointly funded piece of work to identify the costs and receipts associated with RDC services provided in Rye. Cllr Russell undertook to pursue this with the Head of Finance.

Cllr Sonia Holmes

Land north of Udimore Road The Inquiry into RDC's refusal of the first planning application would be held on 29 April. RDC had allocated £20,000 to engage the services of a QC.

Rye Fisheries The Cabinet had agreed to give the Partnership a grant of £15,000 towards the refurbishment project but had suggested that the Partnership should approach RTC for a £5,000 contribution.

RYE TOWN COUNCIL, 17th MARCH 2008
REPORT OF ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

Udimore Road

The Council meeting of 3rd March resulted in a partial success. The 6 month delay in release of the site from its reserve status should give us time to make progress on the brown-field sites which have been identified. The County Council now has the key role in these negotiations. Not only do the school sites have to be formally brought into play, as well as progress made in respect of the Rock Channel Planning Brief, but also we are reliant on greater urgency being injected into all aspects of preparing for the Hastings/Bexhill relief road around which it is expected that some 1,100 houses can be constructed. A typical recent hiccup was an objection by Natural England into some aspect of road construction which could give rise to the need for a further consultation period and consequent delays.

At that Council meeting, the answers to various supplementary questions were incomplete: and we need to have the latest information as to new housing completions in Rye – which may well confirm what some of us believe: that we are already taking our share of the numbers forced on us. The amendment proposed towards the end of the Council debate (effectively to lock the issue in a cupboard until 2012) was a fine example of playing to the gallery. The Local Plan is not set in stone; and the world just will not stand still on this issue for the next 4 years.

Rother's Planning Committee refused the first planning application: and that decision is the subject of an appeal which will be heard soon. The Report within the Agenda for last week's Planning Committee meeting includes all the up-to-date representations regarding the application. It remains a precarious matter.

The Chapel at Rye Cemetery

After consultations with us, with Rye Foreign and with Rye Conservation Society, Rother's preliminary view is that to rebuild the chapel would incur unnecessary immediate and on-going building and running costs. The preferred option is, therefore, to leave the remains as a feature ruin and try to provide additional car parking. A local structural surveyor and architect is

about to be instructed to assess this option and determine the structural soundness of the second building. Works could be completed by the autumn.

Budget 2008/09

The Band D Council Tax for 2008/09 in Rye is £1,508.48 (or £29.01 per week). The Rother element within that, which remains the lowest tax in East Sussex, is £150.68 (i.e. £2.90 per week) – almost exactly 10 per cent of the bill. If you add Rye’s “special expenses” and this Council’s precept to the Rother element, it reaches £213.72 for each bill for the year. Thus, out of your £29.01 per week, you are paying £20.94 to the County, £2.48 to the Police, £1.48 to the Fire Service and £4.11 to Rother and Rye.

One imponderable is the financial implication of the national scheme of free bus travel. As usual with Government, there is a gap in funding; and there is uncertainty as to how much the national scheme will cost Rother - since all depends on how many people use the scheme and the reimbursement rates agreed with bus operators.

Grounds Maintenance

Our Town Clerk is in touch with Rother over the matter of devolved services and we are perhaps now reaching a crucial stage in the resolution of these issues. It may be that Rye’s grounds maintenance work, at a value of £76,696, represents significant volume within Rother’s overall contract. Since this exercise is under way, and I never expected it to be concluded quickly, the next Rye/Rother Liaison meeting assumes some significance. Identifying the costs and income, over a range of activities, associated with Rother services provided in Rye is a painstaking operation. Rye’s “special expenses” are tied up in this; and there has to be a global solution such that:

- (a) neither the Rother nor the Rye tax-payer has to pay one extra groat and
- (b) we can be certain that those services will be better and more responsively provided.

Allotments

Within next year’s budget are these “special expenses” figures: Bexhill Allotments £22,420 and Rye Allotments £ 7,640. Issues surrounding the management of this service are under review.

DR 17/03/08