

**Minutes of an Additional Meeting of the Town Council held at the Town Hall,  
Rye, on Monday 26 November 2007**

**PRESENT** Councillors Granville Bantick, John Breeds, Bernardine Fiddimore, Lorna Hall, Sonia Holmes, Jo Kirkham, Paul Osborne (**Mayor**), Frank Palmer, Shaun Rogers, David Russell, Sam Souster (**Deputy Mayor**), David Wright

**IN ATTENDANCE** Richard Farhall - Town Clerk; Andy Hemsley – *Rye Observer*; Rye Town Services Directors – Geraldine & Robert Bromley, Kerry de Courcy, Rita Cox and Alison Simmons; 5 members of the public

*The meeting commenced at 7.31*

**73 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were accepted from Cllr Sylvia Willgoss.

**74 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

Cllr Sam Souster *prejudicial* **item 78** Partner a RTS Director

**75 MAYORAL ANNOUNCEMENTS**

*Engagements* In the last few weeks the Mayor had: attended the Rye Bowls Club Anniversary Dinner, Rye Lions Dinner and the Classic Car Cruise – and had met the new Primary School Head.

**76 COUNCIL MINUTES**

**RESOLVED 1 To amend the draft Minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2007 (C9) as follows:**

- A** *Page 1, 65 Apologies* **Delete** Wright **Insert** Willgoss
- B** *Page 2, 71b) Rye Town Manager, para 1, line 4* **Delete** reviewed. **Insert** reviewed and perhaps re-named 'Town Co-ordinator'.
- C** *Page 6, Report of the County Councillor, New Primary School, para 3, lines 1-3* **Delete** advised that . . . car park. **Insert** suggested that if there were insufficient spaces in the Sports Centre car park even after efforts had been made to ensure legitimate users only were parking there then the situation would need to be addressed.
- D** *Page 8, para 3, line 4* **Delete** £10,000 **Insert** £20,000

**RESOLVED 2 To adopt the amended Minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2007 (C9).**

77 **COMMITTEE MINUTES**

(a) **Planning & Townscape**

**RESOLVED Adoption of the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2007 (PT14).**

7.38 *The Mayor adjourned the meeting to allow the Directors of Rye Town Services to discuss, with Councillors, the Heritage Centre Occupancy Fee for 2006-07. (See Appendix.)*

8.09 *Cllr Elliott left the meeting.*

8.16 *The meeting reconvened*

78 **RYE HERITAGE CENTRE**

Members were invited to consider Rye Town Services' presentation and to agree a course of action.

The Clerk confirmed that it was possible for the Council to partly/wholly waive the Occupancy Fee but that it should be mindful that it might be called upon to justify the action by an auditor or local Council Tax payers.

The discussion ensuing included the comments following: the Council should be guided by what was in the best interests of the town; RTS's advertising was rather old fashioned; Rother's TIC grant reduction of £20,000pa was always going to cause problems for the operator; the Occupancy Fee could be paid in installments or deferred until next year; it had clearly been a difficult trading year.

**RESOLVED (unanimous) To accept an Occupancy Fee from Rye Town Services of £1000 only for 2006-07 on the basis that: it has been a difficult trading year for the Heritage Centre; circumstances were such that RTS was unable to implement improvements to the business prior to Easter 2006; both the Town Council and RTS are working in partnership for the benefit of the town and the local economy; payment to the Council would be made without further delay; and that improvements are being introduced which should result in increased revenue streams.**

*Cllr Souster returned to the Chamber.*

79 **TILLING GREEN POST OFFICE**

**RESOLVED To note that the Post Office Ltd has proposed the closure of Tilling Green Post Office, that there is a 6-week public consultation period from 13 November, and to agree that the Council's response be considered, prepared and submitted by the Public Services Committee (next meeting: 3 December).**  
Clerk

80 **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items to consider.

*The meeting ended at 8.40.*

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

**78 RYE HERITAGE CENTRE**

*In accordance with para 12(2) of the Council's new Code of Conduct, Cllr Souster re-stated his prejudicial interest in this item and made the statement following:*

Cllr Souster hoped that the matter of the payment of the 2006-07 Occupancy Fee could be resolved amicably. When RDC reduced its Rye TIC grant by 40% it was Rye Town Services which ensured that the TIC remained open.

Although the Rye Town Initiative (1993) recommended that the TIC be relocated, a subsequent Partnership-funded report (February 2000) concluded that staff working conditions and space restrictions could be overcome. This resulted in a £100,000 extension/upgrade, funded largely by Single Regeneration Budget monies.

*Cllr Souster then left the Chamber.*

The presentation by the RTS Board of Directors included the comments following:

- There has been a steady fall in visitor numbers since 9/11 – last year was particularly bad. Tourist towns with no previous need to market themselves were now doing so
- The Heritage Centre(HC)/TIC still brings people into the town – which benefits the local economy
- The HC may have closed had not Rye HotCats formed RTS – RTC's position was that it would not run Rye TIC for a RDC grant of £30,000pa.
- RTC Directors are unremunerated
- The audio tours equipment 'inherited' by RTS was in very poor condition
- A replacement system – 'wands' - were ordered from a reputable supplier using a £12k grant from the Partnership. The contractor had had supply difficulties but the wands – recorded by Rye Shakespeare Company - would be delivered shortly and should produce a substantially enhanced revenue stream
- It took the Planning Authority almost a year to agree to plans to make the HC more attractive – consequently, none of the improvements planned for 2007 has been implemented
- Most of the HC staff have been in post for many years - of benefit to both the Centre and the town
- RTS is the Council's managing agent and is a non profit making company. Its shareholders are exclusively HotCats members
- Rye TIC can never make a profit – it is a service provided for the benefit of Rye & District
- Rother has no statutory obligation to fund TICs
- RTS's Articles of Association prevent profits being paid out as dividends – instead they must be used for the promotion of Rye
- The interests of RDC and RTC are similar
- The 5 (rather than 1-2)-year Agreements between RDC and RTS - and RTS and RTC – cause HC staff less anxiety and uncertainty.
- Rising numbers of prospective visitors research destinations on the internet and book accommodation online
- Fewer visitors to the HC with accommodation enquiries affects retail sales
- The HC's main asset is the Town Model – the Centre needs to be promoted as a retail outlet in its own right
- The 5-year Agreement with RDC was agreed in October 2005 – the Agreement with RTC was not finalised until early March 2006. Consequently, RTS was

unable to undertake any improvements prior to Easter which, in turn, had affected sales

- Although the 2006-07 Accounts had not yet been finalised, RTS expected them to show a small profit or 'break even' – insufficient to pay to the Council the minimum Occupancy Fee of £5,000.
- The improvements which RTC had agreed to support up to £5,000 had been scaled down to make them more affordable and would be undertaken in January.
- If the Council no longer has confidence in RTS it is at liberty to invoke the termination clause
- RTS is planning tentatively to enter Rye TIC into Tourism South-East's TIC of the Year competition
- **RTS could not currently afford to pay the Council the £5,000 Occupancy Fee**

Responding to a question from Cllr Fiddimore – who was concerned that the HC might not have been marketed effectively - Kerry de Courcy advised that a HC Marketing Plan had been in place for a number of years. Councillors were welcome to visit the Centre and make suggestions.

The Clerk observed that one of the main reasons the signing of the RTC-RTS Agreement was delayed was because the Council's legal advisor had difficulty understanding the nature of the Agreement.

Replying to a question posed by Cllr Russell, Mr de Courcy stated that the Directors had been aware at the outset that the Centre would require some considerable effort to maintain a high level of service.