

**Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Town Council held at the Town Hall, Rye,
on Tuesday 3 March 2009**

PRESENT Councillors Granville Bantick, John Breeds (**Deputy Mayor**),
Brian Elliott, Bernardine Fiddimore, Lorna Hall, Paul Osborne, Ian
Potter, Shaun Rogers, David Russell, Mary Smith

IN ATTENDANCE Richard Farhall - Town Clerk; Peter Cosstick (*part*); Teresa O'Kelly
and Andrew Gostelow (Tourism SE) (*part*)

The meeting commenced at 7.01

112 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were accepted from Cllrs Sonia Holmes, Sonia Holmes,
Jo Kirkham and Sam Souster (**Mayor**).

113 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Cllr Paul Osborne *prejudicial* **item 116** Member of authority
awarding the contract

Cllr David Russell *prejudicial* **item 116** Member of authority
awarding the contract

The Clerk voluntary declared an interest in item **114** as a trustee of Action in Rural
Sussex, which had quoted to collate the Local Action Plan main questionnaire data.

114 RYE LOCAL ACTION PLAN

Members were asked to consider a request from the Rye Local Action Plan Steering
Group for additional funding of £500 towards the independent collation of the data
contained within the c530 completed (full survey) questionnaires. Cllr Osborne
advised that the original idea was that Steering Group member would collate and
analyse the data; however, the response had been much better than anticipated and
had become unmanageable.

Members considered the amended LAP Budget. It was noted that, although more
expensive (£1140.55 as opposed to £678) the Steering Group considered that Action
in Rural Sussex's quotation more accurately reflected the amount of work involved.
The Steering Group had adjusted the budget to accommodate the AiRS quotation
and this has resulted in a shortfall of £500.

Cllr Smith suggested the work required could be shared among Members. Some
concern was expressed that this would expose Councillors to the risk of being
accused of having influenced the action planning process – which could undermine
the credibility of the published plan.

The Clerk observed that the original budget suggested to Council had been £10,000.
The amended budget was £8,205.

Cllr Smith requested a named vote on the proposal following:

**That RTC contributes an additional £500 towards the production of the
Rye Local Action Plan.**

Proposer: Cllr Bantick Seconder: Cllr Rogers

For Bantick, Jonathan Breeds, John Breeds, Elliott, Fiddimore, Hall, Osborne,
Potter, Rogers, Russell

Against Smith

115 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was considered that there was no need to exclude the public and press because there was none present.

7.26 *Andrew Gostelow and Teresa O'Kelly arrived.*

Cllrs Osborne and Russell re-stated their prejudicial interest in the item following and left the Chamber.

116 RYE HERITAGE CENTRE

(a) Tourism South-East

Members were advised that Rother District Council had resolved to award the Rye Tourist Information Centre contract 2009-12 to Tourism South-East and were asked to consider TSE's request that the Heritage Centre be made available to it for a term of 3 years.

Andrew Gostelow (AG) explained that TSE was the Regional Tourist Board for the area, employed 40 staff, and was a company funded through SEEDA and the private sector. TSE had identified Rye as being a 'strategic priority' and it was therefore prepared to subsidise the running of Rye TIC to the extent of £20,000-£25,000pa. Rye TIC had one of the highest footfalls in the SE.

Although most TICs are loss-making they make a substantial contribution towards their local economies. A recent economic impact study had revealed that every £1 invested in attracting visitors produced £1.30 for the local economy.

TSE had previous – and current – experience of operating TICs on behalf of local authorities and considered that Rye was an important strategic destination.

TSE would need to operate from the Heritage Centre in order to take advantage of the established infrastructure and revenue streams.

TSE was aware that the previous operator was contracted to make an annual payment to RTC of at least £5,000pa.

TSE had the skills necessary to improve visitor spend in the area and provide a quality visitor experience. A Rye team would be backed up by a range of support services – HR, customer services, central purchasing and so on.

The terms and conditions of employment of the existing HC staff would be protected under the TUPE Regulations.

TSE was happy to sign up to a mutually-acceptable occupancy agreement but did not usually take on building repairs – although, if necessary, it could draw on a maintenance team based at Eastleigh.

Cllr Elliott *How would TSE's marketing initiatives dovetail in with existing provision and not confuse the overall message?*

AG By developing and maintaining strong links with all stakeholders. The Rye TIC manager would have the flexibility to support local events.

Cllr Rogers *Would any rebranding be considered necessary?*

AG Just the removal of the old ETC sign.

Cllr Smith *Would TSE be responsible for signage?*

AG There was no budget for this. TSE would expect RTC to be responsible for the HC 'roundel'.

Cllr John Breeds observed that, given the economic climate, it was now harder to assess what would be a reasonable rent.

Responding to a question put by Cllr Jonathan Breeds, AG agreed that a considerable amount of business was now done on line and flagged up the Destination Management System (which sits within England Net).

Cllr Potter *Did TSE think the HC was the best site for a TIC?*

AG 'Good' but not ideal – a central location would be preferable but the Strand Quay area benefited from 'general activity'.

Cllr Fiddimore *How would TSE deal with request from local businesses for their promotional literature to be available at the HC?*

Teresa O'Kelly To be consistent, normally only accommodation providers would be permitted to provide material; however, a designated space (such as a board) could be made available for commercial organisations.

7.50 *Andrew Gostelow and Teresa O'Kelly left the Chamber and Peter Cosstick entered.*

(b) Options

Members were invited to determine the Council's position in respect of the preceding request, to consider the Councils' options, and to agree a course of action.

Peter Cosstick (PC) was permitted to address the meeting.

Since the New Year PC had spent considerable time at the HC becoming familiar with the business. He suggested that his observations might help the Council to decide a way forward – and he spoke to his *Summary of Options* dated 1.3.09 and a Forecast Cashflow 2009-12 (assuming no TIC on site) – both distributed previously.

PC had been disappointed that RDC's Cabinet had decided to award the TIC contract to TSE (subject to it securing suitable accommodation) and emphasised that, of the options he had identified, if terms could be agreed with TSE, this option was the most desirable because it ensured the continuation of a networked TIC. That said, he considered that running the HC as 'standalone' business, with him as the manager on a profit share basis, was a viable proposition. Furthermore, to demonstrate his commitment to such a venture he would be prepared to waive the £6,000pa management charge and to invest £5,000 of his own money in Year 1.

(8.35 Cllr Jonathan Breeds left the meeting)

The discussion ensuing included the comments following: more could be done to increase the spend of coach parties visiting the Model; TSE might 'cherry pick' the best stock – leaving RTC with the problem of having to dispose of unwanted items; RTC should be guided by what would be in the best interest of the tax payer; RTC could be blamed for the loss of the TIC if it did not make the HC available to TSE; given the increase in online accommodation bookings it could be argued that 'traditional TICs' were on their way to becoming redundant; Option I (TSE) would involve RTC in very little work whilst receiving the benefit of an annual rent; if TSE got more involved in marketing in the area, the 1066 Country Marketing Campaign might be inclined to reduce its work supporting Rye; increasing visitor numbers were down to the efforts of smaller businesses to promote themselves and the town; RTC was in a no win' situation; in considering the TSE option, RTC would need to agree the rent, treatment of the stock and responsibility for repairs; RTC could allocate a space for TSE in the HC; Rye could benefit from TSE's presence – there was (reportedly) a large number of vacant properties in Battle High Street; RTC should be able to obtain £8,000pa rent from TSE

and the town would benefit from a FT TIC Manager; the TSE option was less of a risk than the standalone option – and was, therefore, more ‘defensible’; the rent should go some way towards reflecting the value of the assets that would be made available to TSE.

Peter Cosstick left the Chamber.

RESOLVED 1 (7 votes to 2) To enter into negotiations with TSE on the basis following:

Rent	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Opening position	£8,000	£10,000	£12,000
Minimum acceptable	£8,000	£8,000	£10,000
Stock (sale/transfer)	The best deal that can be negotiated by the Clerk		
Signage	TSE to be responsible for all		
Opening position	RTC to be responsible for all non-TIC		
Minimum acceptable	signage		
Insurance	TSE to insure the contents; RTC the building		
Maintenance	RTC to be responsible for the fabric of the building; TSE for the interior and for returning the HC in a similar condition.		

RESOLVED 2 That the Members following be authorised to be present (with the Clerk) during negotiations: Elliott, Fiddimore, Hall and Potter.

The meeting ended at 9.29

Date Chairman