

**RYE TOWN SERVICES PRESENTATION:
REBRANDING/UPGRADING RYE HERITAGE CENTRE**

RTS Chairman/CEO Kerry de Courcy (KdeC) address to Members included the observations following:

- RTS had been approached by interior designers Snappytitle last year which subsequently submitted some proposal FOC and plans (charged)
- Snappytitle's proposals took into account the views of Tourism SE (14 recommendations), RTS Directors and HC staff
- The HC is suffering from falling footfall (with increased internet access, fewer people are visiting the building for TIC services) and under-investment in the audio tours
- Despite fewer visitors, Town Model income was 'holding up'
- The HC is not currently commercially viable
- Snappytitle had emphasised the importance of making the HC exterior more inviting – as well as the 'gateway to the town' – this included (Phase I) proposals for banners/posters, a flag pole and new window displays
- A Rye Partnership grant had enabled RTS to purchase £12,000 worth of 'wands' to enhance substantially the audio tour experience.
- RTS was seeking RTC's support and approval to spend an agreed level of capital (eg up to £15,000). Sources of funding could include business development loans, RTC (say, £5,000) and grants (Markets Towns programme, InterReg III).
- The success of Phase I (pre-Easter 2007) would be reviewed before embarking on Phase II (October 2007).
- RTS would endeavour to source cheaper estimates.

Cllr Dyce supported development of the HC but pointed out that, contractually, RTC was responsible for the cost of maintenance of the fabric of the building only. He was concerned that, if it contributed to the capital expenditure proposed, RTC could be approached by other commercial organisations seeking comparable treatment.

K de C stressed the RTC was the owner of the Heritage Centre and the business – not only a proportion of the stock but also the goodwill. RTS was simply managing it on the Council's behalf. RTC receives 75% of annual net profit and was being asked to support/invest in its own business.

Geraldine Bromley stated that RTS Directors viewed themselves as custodians of the Centre. The HC was essential to the well-being of the town and those who depended on visitor revenue for economic benefit. The challenge was to reverse visitor decline – evidenced also by falling bed occupancy rates.

The majority of Councillors commenting were in favour of developing the Centre.

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Referring to the top of page 5 of Appendix A of the last Council Minutes, George Shackleton explained that his quote that 'the Government considers Rother to be a wealthy area' had been taken from the Rother Statement of Accounts. He had queried whether this quote could be attributed to the Treasury. He had expected a Rye District Councillor to check and report back to him but this had not happened. However, A RDC officer had conceded that the quote had not formed part of an explicit statement from a Government Minister.

Therefore, the inclusion of such a statement in a consultation document was misleading.

George Shackleton *Was Rother District Council's Annual Monitoring Report submitted – with amendments – by 31 December 2006? What were those amendments? What is the Planning Delivery Grant which RDC would have lost if it had not met the 31 December deadline?*

Cllr Souster undertook to source answers to these questions.

Cllr Souster

Mary Starling *What was the Council's position in relation to Rother's public consultation on a Draft Dog Control Order – which would mean that dogs would be allowed on to the beaches at Camber and Winchelsea Beach only in the evenings outside of winter – and would also restrict the number of dogs that can be walked?*

Mayor Along with other parish councils, Rye Town Council was consulted prior to the public consultation. The Council has asked for dogs to be permitted off the lead in the areas following: Mason's Field, Fair Salts, Gibbet Marsh and the Kings Avenue open space.

Cllr Russell added that RTC would be considering the matter again at a special Policy, Resources & GP meeting to be held on 5 March.

Cllr Glazier advised that he had just received a message from Cllr Gubby indicating that parish/town councils would be consulted again in July-August.

REPORT OF THE COUNTY COUNCILLOR

New Primary School Cllr Glazier advised that the planning application had yet to be submitted; however, the intention remained to open the new school by September 2008.

Council Tax Last week the Cabinet recommended a budget to Council which represented an increase of 4.3%. Cuts to youth services had been avoided because governors, head teachers and others had decided to contribute, over the next 3 years, £1m of the schools and colleges' 'Head Room' monies.

Age Concern ESCC would again be contributing £100,000.

Parish Maintenance Team Two teams (east and west) would be provided, working all year.

Footways £1/4m had been identified for improving rural and urban footways.

REPORT OF THE ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCILLORS

Members received Cllr Bantick's written report. *See Appendix B.*

Cllr Carey suggested that, given the existence of the former Lower School site and the closure of Freda Gardham and Tilling Green schools, there would be no need to develop greenfield sites.

Cllr Souster advised that the Environment Agency had stated previously that it would not support residential development on the Freda Gardham site. Cllr Glazier advised that future uses of the site could not be considered until it had been declared officially surplus, following closure of the school. ESCC remained in discussions with a developer (which held a ransom strip) concerning the Lower School site.

Members received Cllr Souster's written report. *See Appendix C.*

Responding to a question from Cllr Izod, the Clerk advised that Rother was arranging a waste recycling seminar, presented by Envirocomms, at the De La Warr Pavilion.

Rother District Council Report
by Cllr Granville Bantick
at 5th February, 2007

You will no doubt have read that Rother managed to squeeze below the “cap” limit of 5% in setting the budget for 2007/08 to deliver a Council Tax increase of 4.99%. This was in line with the increases published in the current financial strategy which aims, we are told, are to establish a sounder financial future for the council. At a recent Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting members were told that the threat of cuts to services had been averted, as savings had been identified in the budget. Uncommitted reserves, which currently stand at £3.1 million out of total reserves of £10.6 million, could have been used to offset some or all the savings required to balance the budget, but the Council considered that it would be imprudent to do so, continuing the policy set out in the Financial Strategy document which says “uncommitted reserves are available to meet one off costs. They are not to be used to meet ongoing commitments.” Despite fears that cuts would have to be made, members identified savings of £114,800. This figure is made up by a saving of £15,000 in parks and open spaces, an increase of £30,000 in car parking income, the decision to manage surplus funds “inhouse” rather than through external fund managers which would contribute to a further saving of £30,000, a saving of £4,800 in corporate resources, a reduction of £30,000 in the budget for housing needs and stock condition surveys, and finally a saving of £5,000 for the non-recurring item of set up costs of introducing Choice Based Lettings.

You will know that the Cabinet recommended to the Council on the 19th December last that in accordance with the mechanism contained in the adopted Local Plan for the managed release of housing land, it should resolve not to raise any objection to any planning application for housing development on the allocated site north of Udimore Road. The Full Council will deliberate on this issue on the 5th March when Cllr Souster and I will hope to speak on the issue. We may be restrained from giving personal opinions due to our having a to declare a personal interest due to the fact we live close to the proposed development, but we are not restrained in stating the opinions of others, many of whom are very knowledgeable in matters relating to the land in question which is prone to cause flooding. There are of course many other reasons, which this Council is aware of, why this development should not proceed. I am pleased this Council has submitted its objections to the scheme to Rother District Council’s Planning Department. Let us hope our objections are heeded.

Associated with this particular matter is the question of flooding which some members will know is a subject which has been occupying a great deal of my time lately. I have been in copious correspondence with officers in several departments at Rother, having gathered much information on the risks of flooding in the town which are likely to occur from unwise development, rising sea levels and water courses impeded by uncleared debris by the lack of maintenance by landowners. I have been informed by the Senior Planning Office, Sarah Anderton, that I shall receive a joint response from the

officers in reply to the submissions I had sent to Rother. Of these is the all important Section 25 of the Land Drainage Act, 1991 which requires land owners having ditches or water courses on their land to keep them cleared at all times. It states that where any ordinary watercourse is in such a condition that the proper flow of water is impeded, then the local drainage board or local authority can serve a notice to the land owner to remedy the situation. I am informed, however, that it is doubtful that such clearance of the ditches would itself remedy the potential flooding of Tilling Green Estate in the event of the development taking place due to the topography of the land, but could assist other areas prone to flooding in the town.

I recently had a meeting with the local Environmental Agency officer and the Manager of the Internal Drainage Board based in Romney Marsh. They are both extremely concerned with the situation around and within Rye, and the whole Romney Marsh area. Their knowledge was invaluable and I am now pressing home what I have learnt on Rother and the Environment Agency to initiate some action. Unfortunately due to this Government's cutbacks on funding to the Environment Agency it does limit their action. A strange policy when global warming is making the headlines. Incidentally these agencies are also very concerned with the potential for flooding if the Udimore Road development gets the go ahead. No doubt they will be consulted by Rother.

Yet another Working Party has been created to make recommendations on the strategic and contractual issues relating to the new Ground Maintenance Contract. The current contract with John O'Conner terminates after six years in March 2009. Maintenance of these areas covers a wide spectrum including car parks, public conveniences, cemeteries, allotments, leisure and sports centres and municipal buildings such as the Town Hall in Bexhill. The contract is further broken down to include landscape renovation, litter collection, children's play areas and foot paths and drives. It is undoubtedly a very important activity and the working party will be busy.

There are probably many other matters I have not covered in my report, but which I feel covers the most important matters which concern Rye.

DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT
RYE TOWN COUNCIL 5TH FEBRUARY 2007

Land north of Udimore Road

Many of you will be aware that with the rejection of the Marina Development by the Government Inspector, the only other identified development location of any size was the 'greenfield site' north of Udimore Road.

The approved Local Plan states that 'this is the only Greenfield site in Rye that is not subject of any nature conservation designation, and that the 3.8 hectares of land suitable for 114 dwellings should be held in reserve pending adequate provision being available on Brownfield sites.

Rother District Council maintains that alternative locations are not available, and the Cabinet agreed unanimously at the meeting of 19th December 2006 to recommend to Council meeting on 5th March 2007 that the land should be removed from the reserve list, and released for development. I spoke against the recommendation stating that the release of the land was premature, and that there were strong planning objections to any development, therefore, would it not make sense to investigate these potential problems before releasing the land?

This was rejected.

I was unable to attend the RTC Planning and Townscape Committee (22nd January 2007), but I did submit a detailed written report suggesting a way forward, as there will be strong opposition to this development, which will have a severe impact on the town.

Three previous applications on this land have been refused by RDC. Both Government and RDC have a policy that states that all other avenues for development must be explored before Greenfield sites are included for building.

Ruth Kelly, the Communities and Local Government Minister said only last week that 'Local Authorities should continue to contain urban sprawl.....Green Belt policy has served us well and must continue to do so.

This development, if it succeeds will provide houses for the whole District not just Rye.

This Council is opposed to the development, and has informed RDC, perhaps Michael Foster MP should be involved. He has been briefed.

Waste Management and Recycling

As a member of RDC's Waste Management Working Group, I am able to keep you updated. Meetings are now frequent as April approaches and the new contract is rolled out.

Envirocomms has been appointed to publicise the new system, because awareness is going to be the key to a successful changeover; for it to work successfully. The changeover is major, as until now waste has always been put out in black bags and collected. As I have stated before, this change is necessary because of targets set for

recycling by Central Government, and perhaps more importantly landfill will not be available after next year.

Envirocomms has held Focus Group Meetings, which have attracted only 75 people, 12 of whom were at the meeting in Rye. I considered this unsatisfactory, but was told it was usual and cost effective. Envirocomms has attended a Rother Environment Group meeting (REG), but has yet to get round to the towns and parishes. I had hoped to get the company to address RTC, but a charge of £250 discounted was demanded. There is a dedicated Rother Recycling Website, which I am told, is attracting hits.

The campaign is now due to intensify with more advertising, doorstep visits and will culminating with a Road Show launch on 12th April 2007 outside Battle Abbey, with music etc., and endorsed by John Craven. Time permitting it was anticipated that it would then move on to Rye, Northern Rother and finish in Bexhill.

Verdant, the main contractor, is in the process of obtaining new vehicles, the workforce is in place and there will be a transitional period of collecting, as the old system is slowly superseded by the introduction of the new recycling scheme.

The 'Independent' newspaper has recently run a campaign detailing the extravagant packaging used in supermarkets. In line with the introduction of recycling, pressure must be put on these stores to reduce this waste. Could not the Council, again with REG, initiate a local campaign?

Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005

Dog Control Order

(This legislation also includes litter, graffiti and fly-posting)

There is much concern in Rye and other parishes about the proposals put forward to date that will deny responsible dog owners the right to exercise their dogs, as they have for years without complaint.

There is to be further consultation, and it is essential that whatever is decided must be sensible, because whilst the RDC could apply a proposed Dog Control Order, there must be necessary means to enforce it in place. Such means are vital, as with Street Trading, the means to enforce action are not available.

It would now appear that it is not possible to completely opt out, because this legislation replaces any current By-laws, and in doing so it would be legal for the first time in over a decade to let a dog foul defined streets etc.

Destination Management Strategy (Tourism)

At the RDC Cabinet Meeting on 15th January 2007 a Draft Report, produced by Locum Consultants, was presented, which had been commissioned by SeaSpace in March 2005 with funding from Area Investment Framework (AIF), and Hastings Borough Council, and was developed in partnership with RDC and 1066 Country Marketing Partnership.

The main objective of this exercise was to guide future activity to ensure that 1066 country as a destination be recognised in realising its economic growth potential. In doing so it recognised the strength of the 1066 tourism brand. (However, from my own involvement

in tourism, and questioning guests, I find that the brand has little relevance to many UK visitors, and means even less to those from Europe and overseas)

The decision of the Cabinet was that the Report was dull and offered nothing new. Instead of the recommendation to approve it, instead the Report was just noted.

It has long been recognised that 1066 means little to Rye (and Bexhill for that matter). A tourism link with Romney Marsh would probably be much more effective for Rye.

The Report, which ran for some 31 pages, rated Camber with 4 lines, Battle with 5 and Rye with 7.

SeaSpace is the Hastings and Bexhill Task Force, and this Report is clearly geared to those areas. It should be noted that RDC's marketing money goes to 1066 Country. I would recommend that this Council and Rye Town Services consider this report, and respond accordingly.

Councillor Graham Gubby – Leader, Rother District Council

Cllr. Gubby has announced that he is not to seek re-election in May next, as he has taken a job with the Home Office Immigration Department. He will continue to represent King Offa Division on ESCC.

Already there is much speculation as to whom will succeed him, obviously I will not be consulted! I will not comment further unless questioned.

CLLR S.H.SOUSTER

5th February 2007