

Positioning Statement – Development Brief, Rock Channel Area, Rye – Cllr David Wright, August 2007

After careful consideration, site visits and consultation with a number of parties I propose that Rye Town Council Planning Committee consider the adoption, in part, of the proposals contained within the above document.

Where applicable, caveats have been identified which, in my view, should be included in the Council's formal response to the consultation. The brief would then be fit to be included in Rother District Council's (RDC's) Local Development Framework as an approved Supplementary Planning Document.

It should be noted that any proposals for habitation etc; contained in the document are stated to be of an illustrative nature only. They would be subject to scrutiny, by the Environment Agency in respect of flood risk, Highways in terms of traffic management and both Rye Town Council and RDC in terms of planning applications. Developers would take their own view of the sustainability of the mix of housing, workshops and amenity facilities such as restaurants etc.

The area of land concerned is currently used for a variety of diverse purposes, under a number of different ownerships.

The stated objective of this brief, is to give coherence to the future development of this important area of the town, as and when, parts of the site are brought forward by individual landowners for redevelopment.

Rye has a long maritime association, which at times appears subjugated to the medieval delights of the Citadel and it is therefore right, in my view, that this important area is developed in a manner sensitive to its long maritime connections.

Within the Brief, three sites have been identified in Plan D which are designated 'Opportunity Areas', these are:

Site A – Jempsons/Bournes area

Site B – Allotments

Site C – Fishing peninsular area

Additional areas are identified which may have scope for development in the longer term; these are identified as Areas A1, A2, C1 & C2.

Consideration is also given to ensuring and improving accessibility for pedestrians, cycles, vehicles and the provision of parking.

Given the above constraints, I would propose that the proposals for both Site A & Site C are fully supported.

Site A is unattractive, has a strong commercial flavour and proposals for redevelopment can only enhance its appeal both to visitors and to those residents currently abutting the site.

Site C is also unattractive and has an air of neglect to the point of desolation. What buildings exist have a 'run-down' near derelict appearance. Any development in this area could only enhance the accessibility to the confluence of the Rother / Rock Channel watercourses.

Site B is the exception, and should be excluded from this Development Brief. The Allotments form an oasis in the centre of the area and afford a green space to those whose properties run along the busy A259. Any development in this area should be strongly resisted. Green space is at a premium in Rye and should be protected. This is effectively Option B1 within the document, with some modification of the access.

Whatever proposals are accepted for this area, access is the key. With the recent enclosure of the Fishing Quay and its subsequent inaccessibility, Rye is in danger of losing its key connections with its maritime history and environment.

The extension of Strand Quay, the removal of the unsightly Pumping Station and the provision of a riverside walk, open to all, linking the waterfront from the west through to The Salts in the east adds coherence to this important part of the town. This requires the provision of quality signage, more inviting access and promotion within the Town Guide.

The current footpath is unsigned, narrow and at times overgrown. It requires widening to allow disabled access and the provision of a cycle path. Whilst, in the area of Site B the path is narrow, there is no reason, with some inventive engineering, that the path should not be widened without encroaching on the Allotment space.

In conclusion I would recommend that this Council adopt this Development Brief, subject to the caveats above, to be part of RDC's Local Development Framework.

Rock Channel Development Brief – Appraisal and Report with Proposal for Adoption

This report has been compiled with reference to the following:

1. Study of the Development Brief (Rother District Council)
2. Site Visit(s)
3. Discussion with affected parties (Resident/Management/Tenants)
4. Exhibition at Community Learning Centre (formerly FE Centre)

The purpose of the Brief, as laid out within the brief is to bring the proposed areas (opportunity areas) for development, into a closer relationship with the Citadel, to highlight and exploit the maritime historical context of Rye as a seaport and shipbuilding centre, to widen the scope of the area for public accessibility and enjoyment and to provide a mixture of commercial and residential design led development. The possibility of all or some of the above becoming reality is largely dependent on the proposed areas becoming available since they are presently under various and diverse mainly private ownership. There is some residential development within the sites and the Brief makes much of a desirability to reflect the diversity of these and the generally unique nature of the town of Rye as regards building materials, building design etc.

The Brief offers a number of detailed plans of the area, identifying the three 'opportunity areas'. It splits the main areas using Plan D as follows

1. Site A – Jempsons/Bournes area including River Café.
2. Site B – Allotments
3. Site C – Fishing peninsular area

Four other sites are identified as having potential for opportunity in the longer term and are identified as A1, A2 and C1 & C2. The brief offers no firm proposals at this stage for these sites.

My studies have found that there is considerable scope for re-development of Site A. The area is dominated by large warehouse type buildings and is frequented by very heavy vehicles sometimes at anti social hours. This site was originally defined for 'light industrial use' but this is no longer the case. Re-development here would improve the view and quality of the houses at the western end of South Undercliff and St Margaret's Terrace and have the effect of lengthening the aspect from Strand Quay – already previously identified as being of key importance in Rye's marketability. However, attention must be paid to the amount of employment provided by the commercial enterprises in this area and that such employment opportunities are not removed from the Rye area altogether.

A similar situation is evident at site C, with scope for sympathetic development around the fishing peninsular. The brief offers the suggestion of hotel type or restaurant provision as part of the plan, and this area would lend itself to such, with far reaching views across the SSSI designated land towards the Romney Marsh.

The exception to the plan lies in site B – Allotments which provide a unique and essential green area to the rear of houses in South Undercliff and allow distant glimpses of the river and the boating traffic. Any development here, including the provision of a 'public area' and bisecting pathway should be resisted. The allotments are referred to in RDC's Local Development Framework document – Sustainability Appraisal for Rock Channel area with four options and Option A – 'no change' should be pursued. It would be relatively easy, and certainly more affordable to widen and signpost the existing path, and incorporate a cycle track through the currently overgrown area below the retaining wall there.

The brief includes the provision of a Riverside Walk, which would certainly be attractive, subject to due consideration being given to security for the numerous craft which have moorings adjacent. A number of the small commercial lots beside the river about the water's edge and it is difficult to see how access could be gained across these areas at present.

Overall I found the proposal to have some considerable merit. I propose that RTC support the options for Site A and Site C with an amended proposed option for Site B. It is my opinion that re-development of all or part of these areas, offers huge scope for a marketing opportunity for the whole town.

15 AUG 2007

RYE ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

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Wednesday 15 August 2007

Dear Sirs,

**Rock Channel area, Rye
Development Brief
Draft Supplementary Planning Document dated July 2007**

Please refer to my letter dated 5 December 2006 in which we called for the two allotment sites in Rye to be regarded as inviolable; their boundaries should not be breached.

Attached please find a questionnaire obtained at the public exhibition in the Community Learning Centre, Lion Street, Rye whilst it was open Thursday 2nd –Saturday 4th August. Please regard this letter as an expansion of the questionnaire.

Paragraph 105, page 30, of the planning document is contentious, there being no reason to believe that Rye's two allotment sites have ever been anything other than statutory. This is not the occasion to rehearse the legal arguments over the two sites' status. No doubt you will be hearing from our lawyers before long.

As for the Council's preferred option, B2, we would regard putting a public footpath through any allotment garden site as being irresponsible in any circumstances. Rye's Love Lane site has had to be surrounded by chain link fencing topped with barbed wire to prevent theft of tools, equipment, and produce. This has not happened at South Undercliff because the allotments are overlooked by the occupants of both the A259 road South Undercliff itself and those of Rock Channel Quay. Some of these householders are themselves plot-holders. Their vigilance has been exemplary.

Were the footpath as proposed to be constructed, a parallel fence would need to be erected along its whole length to keep children and dogs (as walked by local owners) off the allotment plots. To ensure that thieves and vandals also stayed off the allotments would require such a fence to be of the Love Lane type.

The steps at the eastern end of the footpath mentioned under the "Cons" of option B2 (page 32) would almost certainly require an associated ramp to comply with the present Disability Discrimination Act. Local knowledge tells us that this would inevitably be used by a few youths as a skateboard ramp, and probably also be used by illegal mini-motorised vehicles of the type the Police have succeeded in forcing off the public highway.

We would need further and better particulars of the "amenity space" between the footpath and the drainage ditch before being able to comment on it. What imaginable purpose would it serve?

Yours faithfully,

E.R. Godwin
Secretary