

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Town Council held at the Town Hall, Rye, on
Monday 19 August 2019**

PRESENT Councillors Lord Amptill, Mike Boyd (**Mayor**), John Breeds, Cheryl Creaser, Rebekah Gilbert (**Deputy Mayor**), Chris Hoggart, Pat Hughes, Ian Potter, Andi Rivett, Shaun Rogers, Sam Wood *[part]*

IN ATTENDANCE Richard Farhall - Town Clerk; Colonel Anthony Kimber – REACT Chairman; Charlie Harkness – *Rye News*; Dan Channon – ESFRS Station Manager; Sergeant Dave Sands – Sussex Police; 12 members of the public

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm.

68 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence – and the reasons as lodged with the Clerk – were accepted from Cllrs David Bookless, Jonathan Breeds, Jo Kirkham, Sam Souster and Andy Stuart.

69 CODE OF CONDUCT

The interests following were disclosed:

Cllr Rogers *item 72* ESFRS employee

With the consent of the meeting the Mayor brought forward consideration of item 72.

72 THE GEORGE: FIRE DAMAGE

Members were invited to consider the response to the incident by the emergency services (and others) with the ESFRS Incident Commander, Dan Channon and Sergeant Dave Sands.

Dan Channon (DC) gave a brief overview of the incident:

- ESFRS received a call at 4.39am – both Rye appliances attended within 9-11 minutes.
- The fire had spread ‘unseen’- within a 4m void – originating from the ground floor and progressing quickly to the top floor.
- It was believed to have been started as a result of rainwater entering a hole in the roof, travelling down the void, and coming into contact with a consumer unit.
- The hotel staff followed the correct fire procedures – carrying out a full evacuation.
- The Station Manager called for the nearest aerial platform and a further 4 appliances.
- There was a slight delay with the arrival of the platform because the crew initially missed the access (southern end of The Mint).
- There was no problem with parked cars nor water supply.
- DC (who undertakes regular assessments of access issues in the town) arrived on scene at 5.20am.

- Because of the risk of the fire spreading to adjoining buildings the total number of appliances in attendance was increased to 8.
- Containing the fire to the footprint of the George entailed the application of copious amounts of water.
- The reporting in *Rye News* was not entirely accurate – plenty of hoses were in use and the delayed arrival of the platform was not significant.
- Because the hotels' guests might need temporary shelter, RDC's attendance was requested (but was not forthcoming). Fortunately, most of the guests were accommodated at Rye Lodge.
- DC met with the Chairman of REACT, Colonel Kimber after the incident to discuss how the responses to similar incidents might be improved.
- Once the fire had been contained, where possible, guests were reunited with their belongings.
- The High Street was re-opened as quickly as possible.
- The Rye crews were asked to stay on scene until 4.30-5pm (when hoarding was expected to arrive).
- ESFRS has the power to close roads if necessary – as well as to move vehicles in order to facilitate access.

Sergeant Dave Sands (DS) added:

- He was pleased to learn from his ESFR colleagues that inappropriately parked cars had not prevented them from accessing the scene.
- The Police were made aware of the incident at 4.42am. Sadly, no officers were available to attend.
- There were a number of telephone exchanges between Sussex Police and ESFRS thereafter.
- At 8.07am the Police took up position at the Landgate.
- At 10.30am ESFRS requested Police attendance at the scene; however, the Police did not have any officers available.
- At the time of the incident there were 21 officers on duty across Sussex. If the PM's promise of 20,000 extra officers is delivered it would bring the strength of Sussex Police back to 2010 levels.

Colonel Kimber (AK), REACT Chairman confirmed that he had had a follow up meeting with DC to assess the overall response to the incident. The three main initial conclusions were:

- a) ESFRS had found the High Street to be fairly accessible – it might have been a different story if the fire had occurred at the Hope Anchor.
- b) The evacuation by George staff had gone reasonably well.
- c) Scaffolding on access routes did not cause (but could have caused) an issue. Because of the restricted width of the pavements in the Citadel East Sussex Highways needs to ensure that bollards/barriers are placed appropriately in order to ensure that the carriageway remains wide enough to permit larger vehicles to pass.

Colonel Kimber advised that DC had offered to meet with him again once ESFRS had fully assessed the incident. He would seek a position statement from RDC.

Questions from Members and members of the public

Did the aerial platform have to come from Brighton?

DC No, Hastings (Bohemia Road).

Did the driver of the platform initially try (unsuccessfully) to access the scene via the Landgate?

DC Yes, the crew missed the turn into The Mint. However, the resulting delay was not significant in terms of containment.

Surely there would not have been as much damage to the George if the platform had arrived sooner? (It appeared to those members of the public present that the water pressure was insufficient for the jets to reach the top floor.)

DC Prior to the arrival of the platform the hose jets were reaching the roof.

What was the source of the fire?

DC The consumer unit in the kitchen – probably the result of water ingress, from a flat roof, into a large void above the unit. There is no evidence of a lightning strike.

There should have been a fire stop, within the void, at each floor level. Were these installed? Did the George conform with fire safety regulations after its refurbishment 10-15 years ago?

DC Because of the sleeping provision, ESFRS would have inspected The George after the refurbishment (and may have commented on the plans).

Did REACT get involved during the incident?

AK Not formally – REACT is not a responsive organisation. It is, however, interested in 'recovery phases' and post event assessments. On this occasion, no emergency was declared and so there was no involvement from RDC (which shares a PT Emergency Planning Officer with HBC). RDC's duty officer at the time determined there was no need for rest centres to be provided.

When a fire breaks out, resulting in the attendance of ESFRS, is there a procedure in place for alerting neighbours?

DC Yes, anyone deemed by ESFRS to be at risk, is alerted. However, in the case of the George it was clear that the fire was being contained.

Comments from Members and members of the public

- Most importantly, no-one was hurt – The George can be re-built.
- A delivery driver unable to access the Citadel caused gridlock when he left his vehicle in Tower Street in such a way as to prevent a double decker from passing.
- If Police had been on scene ESFRS firefighters would not have had to waste their valuable time altering nearby residents.
DC The Police were preoccupied dealing with a fatality at Camber.
- It was concerning that 3-4 calls were made to the Police, requesting their attendance.
- It was fortunate that the George was able to accommodate most of the displaced guests at its sister hotel, the Rye Lodge – and that the Kino opened up early to provide facilities.
- RDCT is part of the East Sussex Emergency Plan response. Its instructions come from ESFRS – not RDC. Within that Plan, any evacuation from Rye is to Fairlight Village Hall. The East Sussex and Rother Emergency Plans need to be harmonised.
AK Both St Marys and Rye College are designated Rye emergency rest centres.
- An offer of assistance from the Mermaid meant that a wedding due to take place on the morning of the incident was able to go ahead.

The Mayor thanked DC and DS for attending the meeting.

70 COUNCIL MINUTES

RESOLVED To adopt, as an accurate record, the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2019 (C7).

71 COMMITTEE MINUTES

RESOLVED To receive the Minutes of the meetings of the Planning & Townscape Committee held on 8 July 2019 (PT04) and 22 July 2019 (PT05).

73 MAYOR MAKING 2020

RESOLVED That the meeting shall place at 11am on Friday 8 May 2020 (rescheduled early May public holiday) – with the expectation that the arrangements following shall complement/support the local 75th Anniversary VE Day commemorations. Clerk

7.20pm Cllr Wood left the meeting.

74 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

No members of the public and press were present during the consideration of the item following - and so there was no need to formally exclude them.

75 RYE HERITAGE CENTRE

Members were invited to give further consideration towards protecting the premises.

RESOLVED To seek advice from the Conservation & Design Officer and to authorise the Clerk to take forward the officer's recommendation/s.

Clerk

76 GENERAL RESERVE

The Council gave further consideration towards increasing the Council's General Reserve.

a) Land adjacent to 7 Wish Ward

RESOLVED To continue to explore the disposal of the land. Clerk

b) Flat Mouth bust

RESOLVED To auction the bust via Sotheby's (London). Clerk

c) Rye Heritage Centre

RESOLVED To seek a more central location from which to provide visitor information; obtain a market appraisal of the Centre; explore the relocation of the Town Model - and to consult with staff. Clerk

The meeting ended at 7.37pm

Date Chairman