

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Town Council held at the Town Hall, Rye, on
Monday 28 October 2019**

PRESENT Councillors David Bookless, Michael Boyd (**Mayor**), John Breeds, Jonathan Breeds, Cheryl Creaser, Rebekah Gilbert (**Deputy Mayor**), Pat Hughes, Jo Kirkham, Ian Potter, Andi Rivett, Shaun Rogers, Sam Wood

IN ATTENDANCE Richard Farhall - Town Clerk; Paul Goring – Rye Town Sergeant; Jessica Neame – DTCD; Louisa O’Shaughnessy – HC Manager; Gail Dodson – HC Sales & Information Assistant; Gill Pascall – HC Sales & Information Assistant; County Councillor Keith Glazier; John Minter – *Rye News*; 26 members of the public

The meeting commenced at 7pm.

104 PRAYERS

These had been said at the previous meeting.

105 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence – and the reasons as lodged with the Clerk – were accepted from Cllrs Lord Amphill, Sam Souster and Andy Stuart.

106 CODE OF CONDUCT

The were no disclosures of interest – nor requests for dispensation.

Mayoral Announcements

The Mayor reported that recent events/places he had attended included the East Sussex High Sheriff’s Reception at Lewes; Speaker’s Day at Winchelsea, the 30th anniversary of the Sue Ryder shop; the Ferry Road Nursery Duck Race – and the Rye Airfield Memorial Dedication Service.

The Mayor adjourned the meeting for the report of the County Councillor for Rye; the Reports of the Rye Rother District Councillors and Public Question Time. (See APPENDIX A.)

The meeting reconvened.

107 FINANCE

107.1 Heritage Centre

a) Progress Report

The Heritage Centre Manager, Louisa O’Shaughnessy spoke to her written report – adding/highlighting:

- Total till takings for 1-28 October were £6,790 (including £390 taken today – the start of half-term).
- Including BACS payments, the total October receipts to 28 October were £7,900 - £1,105 (12%) under budget.
- 12% below is an improvement on the April & May figures – which were 20% below budget.

- Between April and 28 October, income was 18% below budget.
- By 30 December total income is forecast to be c£80,000.
- All unnecessary spending has ceased – stock is being ‘spread out’ on the shelves.
- Until it is decided whether the HC will be open after next April, it is difficult to know what to advertise and group bookings of the Model are on hold.
- The deadline for a free TSE listing is this Friday.
- There is the option of reducing the HC’s 1066 Country ‘presence’ to save money – focusing on the provision of VI at the Town Hall.
- An estimated 20% of visitors to the HC view the Model and an estimated 55,000 people have been in the HC since 1.4.19.
- Opening hours will be reduced further to reduce costs.
- There is potential to increase the adult Model admission charge.
- It will cost an estimated £3,700 to re-stock core items.
- There is scope for reducing the retail area on the ground floor and filling it with Old Pier Amusements.
- The HC could be reconfigured – and improved - so that an admission fee could be charged to enter the Centre – although there would need to be separate free access for those requiring visitor information only.

The HCM left the meeting.

b) Expenditure and Income

RESOLVED To receive and adopt the Income by Customer Summaries and Expenses by Supplier Summaries for August-September 2019.

c) Budget Monitor

RESOLVED To receive and note the actual income and expenditure against budget to 30 September 2019.

107.2 Town Hall

a) Expenditure

RESOLVED To receive an Expenses Summary for August-September 2019.

b) Budget Monitor

RESOLVED To receive and note the actual income and expenditure against budget to 30 September 2019.

107.3 Account Balances

RESOLVED To receive a Statement of Account Balances as at 30 September 2019.

107.4 Earmarked Reserves

RESOLVED To receive a Statement of Earmarked Reserves as at 30 September 2019.

The Mayor adjourned the meeting for disrobing.

The meeting reconvened.

108 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED In accordance with the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 (1)(2), to exclude the public and press from items 109 and 110 on the grounds that it is likely to involve discussion on employment and contract terms.

109 ASSISTANT TOWN STEWARD VACANCY

RESOLVED 1 To appoint Steve Lippross to the vacant post of Assistant Town Steward with effect from 1.4.20.

RESOLVED 2 In order to help him become familiar with the Assistant Town Steward role, to increase his current hours by 10 a week until 31.3.20.

Clerk

110 RYE HERITAGE CENTRE

Members were invited to review a range of documents supporting a proposed business operating model for 2020-21 onwards,

It was noted that a recent market appraisal values the HC at £370,500.

After carefully considering the points/concerns raised by the members of the public who had attended the first part of the meeting, Members concluded that the Council should prioritise reducing the burden on the Rye Council Tax Payer (by reducing the HC subsidy).

RESOLVED (For: 8; Against: 2; Abst: 2) That:

a) The Centre be vacated after 31 December 2019 and let for a period of up to 3 years from 1 April 2020;

b) A reduced visitor information service (forming the larger part of an Information Point) - and smaller retail offer - be provided at the Town Hall, commencing no later than 1 April 2020;

c) As a last resort, the Town Model be disassembled and placed into storage within the Heritage Centre Attic (at no charge to RTC).

The meeting ended at 8.54pm

Date Chairman

APPENDIX A

Rye Town Council C13

28th October 2019

ADJOURNMENT

a) District Councillors' Reports

The Ward Members were not present and no written reports had been received.

b) County Councillor's Report

Cllr Glazier reported/advised that:

CPE He had attended a meeting of the Rye Parking Strategy Review Working Group, which he had found to be beneficial. He had taken issue with *Rye News* concerning a piece it published alleging that ESCC will disregard any CPE formal consultation comments. This is not the case and he hoped that others would engage positively.

c) Public Question Time

The Town Clerk outlined why the Council had concluded that it needed to relocate visitor information (VI) and find an alternative home for – or to decommission – the Model. Rye Council Tax Payers are providing c£22,000pa to subsidise the HC. The Council had spent a considerable amount of time and effort trying to reduce the subsidy over a number of years.

Comments from members of the public on the future of the Rye Town Model/Heritage Centre included:

- The HC receives thousands of visitors annually.
- The Old Pier Amusement Machines are popular and, unlike the museum space that preceded them, generate revenue.
- The first thing many visitors do when arriving in the town is to visit the Model.
- Rye needs attractions.
- The HC staff provide a valuable service.
- The HC is ideally located and VI does not need to be relocated.
- The Council should consider postponing the relocation/closure so that interested parties have more time to find a way of keeping the Model in situ – and accessible to the public – but with a reduced level of public subsidy.
- RTC does not appear to have considered the impact of the closure of the Model/HC on local businesses in the vicinity.
- The Model could stay in its purpose-built space – but with access via the fire escape. This would free up the rest of the building for other uses.
- Had Bridge Point been approached?
- If the Model was put into storage there would be ongoing costs.
- Is there enough 'heritage' within the HC?
- Could the HC offer work experience opportunities for those interested in working in the hospitality industry?
- A public meeting should be arranged.

- More could be done in the space available within the HC.
- Why does the HC sell London merchandise?
- A small group of members of the public with expertise could be formed to explore options.
- There was a risk that the Old Pier Machines could end up in Hastings.
- The HCM has plans to change the layout in order to increase revenue.
- Has cost benefit analysis been carried out?
- Have volunteers been sought to help at the Centre?
- RTC has not consulted parishioners.
- Raising the Model admission charge would generate additional revenue quickly.
- 11,500 people have viewed the Model since 1.4.19.

Cllr Kirkham advised that RTC bought the Model with the condition that it would fund a sound and light show for it. This resulted in the Council obtaining a loan. It was originally located above the (former) night club. The current location was donated by McCarthy & Stone. Uses for the first floor are limited because of access issues. Originally it consisted of a heritage museum (information panels and display cabinets). At one stage, the grant from RDC to support the provision of a Networked TIC was £52,000pa. Over the years this reduced to nothing. When no agreement could be reached between RTC and RDC, members of the Hotel & Caterers' Association formed Rye Town Services to run the HC with a grant from RDC. Unfortunately, this did not end well and RTC had to step in take it over at short notice, whilst fending off RTS's unpaid suppliers. Since the loss of RDC funding RTC has found it difficult to reconcile the interests of Rye Council Tax Payers and the local visitor economy.

The Mayor assured those present that their comments would be fully taken into account when the Council discussed item **110**.