

RYE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2018

MAYOR'S OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR

As Mayor I have had the pleasure of representing our town both at home and abroad. I do not intend to go into detail because I am sure you are keen that we get to the question and answer session in good time.

I am pleased to report that we successfully completed the purchase of 97 South Undercliff for the purpose of letting it to a Rye household at a discounted rent.

We have only recently advertised a tenancy at a discounted rent because we needed to be certain that our Discounted Accommodation scheme does not contravene equalities legislation. Those of you who took part in the consultation that gave the Council a mandate to obtain a loan to buy a property may recall that the intention was to let it to a *young* Rye household. Although we have had to adjust the scheme so as not to discriminate on the basis of age, in practice we have found that the majority of those applying to be considered for a tenancy by yesterday's deadline have tended to be younger people, with both a strong connection to the Parish and young children.

Until recently, to ensure that the property was generating rental income to offset the loan repayments, number 97 was let temporarily on 'first come, first served' basis. We hope that our first discounted rental tenancy will commence within the next 4 weeks or so.

The transfers of the freeholds of the small parcel of amenity land adjacent to 7 Wish Ward – as well as the land occupied by the Ferry Road Nursery - were completed last year.

The Council has no immediate plans for the land in Wish Ward but is open to suggestions.

The Council is delighted to have been able to provide support – and peace of mind - to the Ferry Road Nursery by ensuring that the land upon which it sits remains publicly-owned. The Nursery is a highly-valued and popular community asset – and so the Council readily accepted an invitation to nominate a representative to sit on its management committee.

We are happy to work with others on projects that help to maintain – or preserve – the historic fabric of the town. Examples include: the refurbishment of the pump housing in Pump Street with the Conservation Society; and contributing to £74,000 of urgent repairs to the Landgate, owned currently by Rother. The Rye

Fund has generously agreed to contribute £3,000 towards the £7,000 the Town Council has resolved to underwrite.

We are part of a small Landgate Working Group – which includes representatives from Rother, Rye Conservation Society, Rye Museum and the Friends of the Landgate - which is considering the longer-term maintenance and future of the Grade I Ancient Monument.

Repairs to the Town Hall cupola have also been commissioned.

The Town Council has continued to do what it can to support our many and varied local voluntary organisations – all of which play a vital role in the social, cultural and recreational life of the town.

Since I last spoke with you the Town Council has agreed grants to a number of these groups – either from its own funds or Rother District Council's New Events Fund. These include:

£250 Tilling Green Residents' Association - Band for summer fete

£2000 Rye & District Community Transport – 326 service

£1500 Entertainment Workshops – Macbook Pro lap top

£2500 Rye Harbour RNLI Station – new lifeboat

£1000 Rye & District Community Transport – John Izod Memorial bus

£2000 2017 Rye Christmas Festival

£4000 Rye Festival of the Sea and Raft Race 2017

In its capacity as the sole managing trustee of the Rye Relief in Need charity the Council has also given grants to help parishioners in conditions of need, hardship or distress. If you know of someone who might need support please have chat, in confidence, with the Town Clerk.

Our Town Steward team continues to receive positive feedback.

Chas Walton works with Nicky Ledger, our Town Steward one day a week and Callum Laverton is providing additional temporary help until the end of this month.

For the first time in 3 years we saw some snow this winter. Our small response team did its best to ensure Rye did not grind to halt. We have topped up the grit bins and hope that we won't have to get our shovels out again until next winter at the earliest! We have lost volunteer snow shovelers and salt spreaders in recent

years and could do with some new recruits. If you think you might be able to lend a hand in future please seek out the Town Steward or Town Clerk.

Early in the year we purchased a petrol mower, which means that we have been able to maintain more of the Parish's grass verges. Strictly speaking these are not our responsibility – but many of you will recall seeing grass verges at Tilling Green reaching waist height! We have taken to stepping in a verge hasn't been cut for a while or has been cut to a disappointing standard – which seems to happen rather a lot.

We will be doing more of this because the County Council is about to reduce urban cuts in Rye from 5-6 a year to 2. Rather than pay the County Council to maintain the level of cuts at 6 we have decided to accept an annual payment from the County Council to help us cut the town's verges as and when necessary.

We have formally adopted the area of land at the corner of Rye Hill and Military Road – and will plant this once we have suppressed weed and shrub growth. We have also applied to adopt the 'green triangle' at Tilling Green. We have been mowing this regularly but would like to add additional features, in consultation with the Tilling Green Residents' Association.

I would like to thank Cllr Andi Rivett for doing such an excellent job refurbishing the bench at the top of Udimore Road. Elsewhere, we have installed new hardwood benches at Gibbet Marsh and on Mason's Field – the former has been sponsored by Tony Bond in memory of former Town Councillor and popular resident, John Izod; the latter by the Tilling Green Residents' Association.

During the year, at both the Town Hall and Heritage Centre, we have installed new telephone, internet and IT equipment – and changed utility providers – in order to achieve ongoing savings. The Council is grateful to Jessica Neame, who works at both properties, for organising this.

In September, the Council was delighted to make Lois Benton its second Honorary Freewoman – in recognition of 4 decades of contributing to the development of Girlguiding locally, as well as encouraging younger parishioners during 34 years of music teaching in the Parish.

We have continued to scrutinise planning applications affecting Rye, passing on our comments to the Planning Authority, Rother District Council. Although it is Rother that has the statutory duty to determine the majority of these applications, we are told that our local knowledge helps to inform its decisions – which must be based on planning law and guidance (both national and local).

Over the last 12 months we did have a number of major applications to consider:

There was an application to build a staggering 72 dwellings on the former Thomas Peacock Lower School site in Ferry Road. We objected to this one on

the basis of overdevelopment, unsafe vehicular access (it being so close to the rail crossing) and insufficient parking.

We have objected to no less than two applications submitted by BP to build a fuel station at the top of Udimore Road, just west of the entrance to Valley Park. We are inclined to agree that Rye would benefit from a second fuel station but not at the proposed location. Such a development would impact adversely on the rural character of the area and the associated illumination would create a nuisance for those living in the vicinity.

Although we did not comment on the Rye Harbour Nature Reserve Discovery Centre planning application – because the location lies outside our parish boundary – we did advise those seeking funding for the development that we support the principle of visitor facilities being improved at the Reserve.

We are ploughing on with the development of a Neighbourhood Plan for Rye and are hugely grateful to Anthony Kimber, the Steering Group Vice Chairman, for continuing to lead the project, so capably, on a voluntary basis.

We have now reached the Regulation 14 consultation. Please bear in mind that comments on the draft Plan need to be received by this Friday. However, if you do find that you have missed the deadline you will get another opportunity to comment before the Plan goes to an independent examiner.

I won't say much about the Heritage Centre because you would have been offered the Manager's written report when you arrived.

However, I would like to take this opportunity to publicly record the Council's appreciation for the ideas, energy and commitment that Louisa O'Shaughnessy and her team have brought to the Centre.

Those of you who have been into the Centre recently will have noticed that it has been given a new look – and we have expanded the stock offering for the so-called 'cultural explorers' who visit our town. We do appreciate – and welcome – the groups of foreign students who are booked in to see the Town Model; however, they are not high spenders and, in today's troubled times, there is the ongoing risk of bookings being cancelled.

Before leaving the Centre I would like to remind you that it is not just there for visitors – for example, if you are looking for a gift do try the Heritage Centre first. You will be helping to ensure that we are able to continue to provide a public service that directly supports our local visitor economy.

Barely a Town Meeting goes by without the perennial topic of the abuse of on street parking being raised. I am sure this year will be no different – but do I have some encouraging news: it is looking very likely that Rother will shortly ask the County Council to introduce a Civil Parking Enforcement scheme in the District.

This will see responsibility for enforcing parking regulations being passed from the Police to the County Council.

We will need to continue to be patient though because Ministerial approval is required, Traffic Regulations Orders need to be checked and road markings and signs will need to be refreshed. It seems that the earliest the scheme could be introduced is April 2020.

In the meantime, we have a small working party which is exploring whether we could make greater use of CCTV to influence driver behaviour and provide potentially useful evidence of damage caused by drivers mounting pavements.

On other highways-related matters, the Town Council has agreed to fund a feasibility study with a view to improving pedestrian safety in Station Approach – and also to look into the cost of acquiring portable electronic speed indicators to rotate around the entrances to the Parish.

Last year I mentioned that Rother had commenced a governance review of Bexhill – a process that was eventually concluded in December. Regretfully, despite nearly 10,000 Bexhill residents expressing a desire to have their own town council, Rother Councillors narrowly voted against the creation of a Bexhill Town Council.

I would like to commend our two Rye Rother District Councillors, Lord Amptill and Genette Stevens – as well as former Rye Town Mayor, Paul Osborne - for voting in favour of Bexhill having its own local council.

This year's Town Council Band D Council Tax is £1.52 week – which is an increase of 21p on last year.

The Town Council has not done this without careful consideration. I mentioned earlier that we have put measures in place to achieve savings; however, the fact remains that when Rother District Council wishes to dispose of its Rye assets it will not give them away for nothing and, where possible, it will try and maximise the sale price.

For the benefit of generations to come, the Town Council is keen to ensure that as many of Rye's community assets as possible remain in public ownership.

Built up over decades, the Town Council's reserves have taken a bit of a hit over the last year with the purchase of the amenity area in Wish Ward, the freehold of the land occupied by the Ferry Road Nursery and 97 South Undercliff. We therefore need to start the process of replenishing our reserves so that we are in a better position to respond to any further proposed disposals of Rother assets with an amenity or historical value.

Additionally, the Town Hall is in need of significant repairs, the Skate Park needs to be resurfaced and we wish to increase the support given to the highly successful Rye Christmas Festival.

In May 2019 there will be District and Parish/Town Council Elections in Rother. It is possible that a number of my Town Council colleagues will not seek re-election – and so I would urge anyone who might be interested in joining the Town Council to have a chat with the Town Clerk about what is involved.

Cllr Jonathan Breeds, Mayor of Rye