

RYE HERITAGE CENTRE

1st year summary report

The RHC Charity Incorporated Organisation formally commenced the lease of the Heritage Centre from Rye Town Council on 1st April 2020 having purchased the Rye Town Model from RTC

Plans to appoint a manager, recruit further volunteers and open the centre from Easter 2020 were quickly thwarted by the pandemic and the associated restrictions. Nick Forman was appointed as manager but did not take up paid employment until later in the year, he did however do much preparatory work in the interim on a voluntary basis for which the trustees are extremely grateful.

Throughout the pandemic the Board of Trustees have worked hard to ensure that the financial position of the charity has been closely monitored and managed and acknowledges the support of Rye Town Council in that endeavour. Unfortunately the fact that the charity had no trading or operating record prior to 1.4.2020 meant that we were not eligible for local or national government support as was available to established businesses during the early stages of the pandemic. Other grant sources such as the Sussex Community fund were not forthcoming either, due largely to the pressure from other groups with understandably greater priorities. It was not until November when we were successful in an application to the Government's Cultural Recovery Fund that we received our first grant of £20,000. This enabled us to initiate the manager's formal employment and to prepare the Town Model for opening under Covid-19 restrictions towards the end of last year and to begin some investment in equipment. Of course the last minute tightening of restrictions following the rapid rise in infection rates prevented us actually opening for business. Undaunted the Trustees and manager have continued to make inroads into the improvement and re-organisation of the centre, aided by donations through social media fund-raising, anonymous unsolicited donations and in particular an anonymous donation specifically made to fund a project to re-site the penny arcade machines in a more accessible location on the ground floor and in a more historically contextual environment. We are grateful to Steve Maxted, the owner of the machines, for his support and co-operation with this project. We were also fortunate to be supported by local artist Richard Adams with the gift of the rights to reproduce and market a new image entitled Rye Heritage which can be seen on display at the centre, prints are obtainable through our on-line shop which was set up earlier in the year. Another generous donation following a social media appeal saw the arrival and installation of a new customer service and sales counter which has greatly helped with improving visitor flow. We are grateful to Herringtons solicitors for the donation and to Bournes Removers for providing free delivery.

Other improvements have included the development of a new web-site, soon to be launched, again generously being provided free of charge, and the replacement of faulty CCTV equipment

As part of the Culture Recovery Grant funding new digital display equipment has been obtained and we are currently working on new digitised interpretations of Rye's rich history, as well as other traditional displays including an illustrated timeline.

Our main intention remains to expand heritage education and interpretation through the Town Model and linking the model story, digital interpretation and traditional displays to provide visitors with a unified experience which will provoke and relate to our visitors encouraging them to continue their exploration of the Town's significant history. We strongly intend to deliver our mission to be a gateway to Rye's heritage signposting other key heritage sites and tourist attractions

Future operational plans include re configuring the first floor display space, renewing worn floor coverings and modernising heating and lighting provision to reduce running costs and improve environmental impact.

The focus in the coming weeks is to open to the public as soon as we are able after the Government's roadmap allows. Then we can begin to generate the income stream needed to meet our outgoings in line with our business plan, and to continue with improving and updating the Heritage Offering to the benefit of the town and the local community

The Trustees remain enthusiastic and committed to securing the future of the Town Model and to bring the Heritage Centre to financial security and self sufficiency

Simon Parsons
Chair
Rye Heritage Centre CIO

18.4.2021