

Minutes of an Additional Meeting of the Town Council held via Zoom on Monday 19 April 2021

PRESENT Councillors David Ampthill, David Bookless, Michael Boyd, Jonathan Breeds, Cheryl Creaser, Bernardine Fiddimore, Rebekah Gilbert (**Mayor** – Speaker of the Cinque Ports), Chris Hoggart, Pat Hughes, Jo Kirkham, Ian Potter, Andi Rivett (**Deputy Mayor**), Shaun Rogers, Andy Stuart, Sam Wood

IN ATTENDANCE Richard Farhall - Town Clerk (Host); Jessica Neame – Deputy Town Clerk (Co-Host); Rother District Cllr Howard Norton; Colonel Anthony Kimber - RNP Co-ordinator; Charlie Harkness – *Rye News*; Simon Parsons – Rye HC CIO Chairman; 1 member of the public

The meeting commenced at 6.32pm.

85 APOLOGIES

There was none.

86 CODE OF CONDUCT

Cllr Hoggart *Adjournment and item 88* Rye HC CIO trustee

87 MINUTES

RESOLVED To approve, as an accurate record, the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 22 March 2021 (C12).

The Mayor adjourned the meeting for an update from Simon Parsons, Chairman of the Rye HC CIO (APPENDIX).

There were no questions.

The Mayor thanked the CIO for its efforts over, what had been, a difficult year.

The meeting reconvened.

88 K6 KIOSKS

Council was invited to consider whether to apply to adopt the kiosks (for £1 each) at the bottom of Conduit Hill and Mermaid Street. It was noted that the Rye HC CIO has expressed an interest in adopting/utilising one – or both.

Comments included:

- Although – as a registered charity – the Rye HC CIO was eligible to adopt K6 kiosks, because they are heritage assets it is usual for them to be adopted by parish/town councils.
- The kiosk at Three Oaks is used as a book exchange.

The Clerk advised that the kiosks would need repainting periodically – and that both the Town Steward and the Assistant Town Steward have experience of this. He

added that BT Payphones is now prepared to continue to cover the cost of the power for the internal lighting of adopted kiosks.

RESOLVED To adopt the kiosks and explore allowing the Rye HC CIO to use one – or both – for a suitable purpose. Clerk

89 REMOTE MEETINGS

It was noted that the Government has announced that it will not make Parliamentary time available to extend the regulations allowing local authorities to meet remotely after 6 May 2021. Instead, it had launched the *Local Authority Remote Meetings: Call for Evidence* consultation (deadline: 16.6.21).

Separately, a number of organisations had lodged a legal challenge (to be heard on 21.4.21) which seeks a judgement allowing a flexible interpretation of 'meeting place' as provided for within the Local Government Act 1972. If successful, local authorities will be able to continue to meet remotely after 6 May.

Members were generally supportive of local authorities continuing to have the option of holding meetings remotely.

RESOLVED To ask the Clerk to respond to the consultation on RTC's behalf (if the High Court Judgement does not support the holding of Council/Committee meetings remotely). Clerk

90 PLANNING & TOWNSCAPE COMMITTEE

RESOLVED To appoint Cllr Fiddimore to the Planning & Townscape Committee.

91 RYE BLOOMS 2021

The Clerk advised that, in support of this initiative, Heringtons had arranged for the public bench outside its premises to be refurbished and had offered £100 towards the cost of replacing the adjacent litter bin.

RESOLVED To purchase a replacement black & gold, pyramid-topped Derby litter bin at a cost of £194 + VAT (after the deduction of a gift of £100 from Heringtons) – on the basis that RDC would, in accordance with its current practice, install it without a charge. Clerk

92 RESERVES

The Clerk advised that, because the Draft Reserves policy had not been included within the meeting papers, consideration of the policy would be deferred until the next meeting. Clerk

93 CONFEDERATION OF THE CINQUE PORTS

a) Speakership

The Clerk advised that the Joint Solicitors had written to Member Towns seeking their views on a proposal, submitted by Tenterden (and seconded by Hastings) that, given the exceptional circumstances in place over the last year (pandemic), Rye should be permitted to hold the Speakership for an additional year (21 May 2021- 21 May 2022) before it is passed to New Romney.

He added that there had been no remote Confederation meetings over the last year because the Joint Solicitors have taken the view that 'lawful'

decisions may be made at 'in person' meetings of the Standing Committee only.

Comments included:

- The proposal is well-meaning.
- Because it was not possible to 'showcase' Rye this year, if there is no 'second year', by the time the Speakership returns to Rye, 15 years will have elapsed since it last did so.
- A second year would enable RTC to promote Rye and help local businesses.
- Rye is reliant on tourism.
- Commercial premises are lying empty.
- RTC has received no formal invitation to hold the Speakership for another year. By the time it had done this (post 21 June) the Speakership will have transferred to New Romney automatically. A response is unnecessary.
- It would be impolite not to respond to the letter seeking Member Towns' views.
- Each Senior Port has held the Speakership, annually and in turn, every 7 years since (at least) 1357 – even during plague and two World Wars. Would Rye wish to be responsible for ending a 664-year-old tradition?
- Those behind the proposal did not consult RTC – nor New Romney TC – before submitting it.
- It is likely that Member Towns have assumed that RTC is supportive of the proposed extension – and may have indicated their support already in order not to disappoint RTC.
- The Clerk has previously summarised the practical considerations – including staff time – on accepting a 'second year'.
- It is unlikely that the Confederation would attempt to impose a 'second year' on Rye if RTC's preference was for it to pass to New Romney on 21 May 2021.
- It may be that New Romney was intending to use the Speakership to promote its town this year.
- Because of overseas travel limitations, Rye should not have much difficulty attracting visitors this summer.
- With the establishment of Speaker's Day, holding the Speakership has become more onerous in recent years.
- It is likely that social distancing will continue, in some form, from 21 June – and so it will be difficult to organise the usual Speaker's Day activities. It is predicted that there will be a 'third wave' of COVID later in the year.
- New Romney TC has noted that there is no precedent for the Speakership not to pass to the next head Port/Ancient Town automatically – however, it has said that is willing to allow Rye to hold it for an additional year (if it wants to).
- It would, perhaps, be better to use the 250th anniversary of the building of the [current] Town Hall as a promotional opportunity – which could boost wedding bookings.
- The economic value of holding a Speaker's Day is likely to be overstated – benefiting just a few businesses (the lunch venue and accommodation providers – if anyone chooses to stay overnight).

The Mayor advised that if Rye had a 'second year' she would help staff with the workload.

The Mayor requested that the proposal following be conducted by way of a named vote.

PROPOSAL FOR RESOLUTION That the Joint Solicitors be advised that Rye Town Council considers that, in accordance with long-standing tradition, the Speakership should transfer automatically to New Romney Town Council on 21 May 2021 – and that it is not prepared to retain the Speakership for an additional year because doing so would be improper and without known precedent.

Proposer Cllr Boyd *Secunder* Cllr Bookless

VOTE

For Bookless, Boyd, Fiddimore, Hughes, Kirkham, Potter, Rogers, Stuart, Wood.

Against Amptill, Creaser, Hoggart, Rivett.

Abst Jonathan Breeds, Gilbert

CARRIED

b) Face covering

Members were asked whether RTC should express an interest in purchasing a quantity of the proposed Confederation face covering (to be worn, when a covering is required, at Confederation events).

Comments include:

- Not every Member is a Confederation representative.
- It is a waste of public money.
- To achieve a degree of uniformity, the Confederation could ask that those attending events wear a plain black or navy blue covering.

RESOLVED (unanimous) To decline the opportunity to register an interest in pre-ordering the face covering proposed. Clerk

94 LANDGATE TOWER

Council was invited to consider RTC's preferences for the Tower in the short, medium and long term.

Comments included:

- A report (produced by John Bailey of Thomas Ford & Partners) sets out the short, medium and long-term maintenance requirements.
- The report identified urgent repairs totaling c£70,000 and RTC, RCS and the Rye Fund agreed to contribute towards the cost of the work (carried out in 2018).
- The maintenance company appointed stated, at the time, that it would be happy to return should there be any problems with its work.
- If the (defective) pigeon netting is removed, the amount of guano within the Tower will increase, resulting in structural damage.
- The current netting was either not installed properly, not maintained after installation – or is inadequate.

- The doors of the clock housing have become detached since the mechanism was last inspected – and there are now birds nesting in it. Ideally, the mechanism should be removed and stored elsewhere.
- The netting – which now contains 4-5 bird carcasses – is not the right type and should be removed.
- Despite the recent clean, there is guano within the structure and when it rains heavily it seeps out from under the doors and runs down the street (which should be reported to Environmental Health).
- The netting has been replaced 3 times within the last 12 years or so.
- The only solution to protecting the structure is some form of permanent roof.
- There are plenty of examples worldwide of modern roofs being installed discretely on historic buildings.
- In the short-term the netting needs to be improved.
- The conclusion of those attending the stakeholder meetings was that the Tower should be managed as a ruin and maintained regularly.
- (Assuming Historic England was supportive) The cost of roofing the Tower would be substantial – and it would be difficult to raise.
- The clock was restored in 1980-81, during Cllr Kirkham’s Mayoralty.
- RDC offered previously to transfer ownership of the Tower to RTC, but RTC declined because no financial support was offered.
- The De La Warr Pavilion has an ‘annual appeal’ of £570,000 – which goes by the name of ‘Council Tax’.
- RDC has neglected the Tower – an Ancient Monument - for decades. The road running beneath it is the main entrance into the town and, if nothing else, maintenance is needed to ensure the safety of road users.
- A Rye Lottery could raise money towards a roof – and architectural students invited to submit design ideas.
- RDC has recently suggested arranging a meeting of the stakeholder group and inviting the Conservation & Design Officer and representative from Historic England.

Speaking from the Public Gallery (with the permission of the meeting), Cllr Norton advised that Winchelsea has the Friends of the Ancient Monuments which raises enough money to maintain 3 historic gates. He suggested launching a roof appeal.

RESOLVED 1 To send Members the ‘Ford Report’.

RESOLVED 2 To ask RDC to replace the netting with a more effective replacement as soon as possible.

RESOLVED 3 To re-form the stakeholder group.

Clerk

The meeting ended at 8.08pm.

Date Chairman