

Minutes of a Meeting of the Town Council held at Rye Community Centre, Conduit Hill, Rye on Monday 6 September 2021

PRESENT Councillors David Amphill, David Bookless, Michael Boyd, John Breeds, Cheryl Creaser, Bernardine Fiddimore, Rebekah Gilbert (**Mayor**), Chris Hoggart, Pat Hughes, Ian Potter, Andi Rivett (**Deputy Mayor**), Shaun Rogers, Andy Stuart

IN ATTENDANCE Richard Farhall - Town Clerk; Jessica Neame – Deputy Town Clerk; Rother District Cllr Howard Norton; Colonel Anthony Kimber – RNP Co-ordinator; John Minter – *Rye News*; Andy Polley – Rye Hire *[part]*

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm.

23 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence - and the reasons as lodged with the Clerk – were accepted from Cllrs Jonathan Breeds, Jo Kirkham and Sam Wood.

It was noted that District Councillor Gennette Stevens and County Councillor Keith Stevens were unable to be present.

It was agreed generally to discuss item 29 immediately after item 25.

24 CODE OF CONDUCT

There were no disclosures of interest nor dispensation requests.

25 MINUTES

RESOLVED 1 *Page 1 (top right)* To delete **C1** and insert **C2**

RESOLVED 2 To approve, as an accurate record, the amended Minutes of the Council meeting held on 30 June 2021 (**C2**).

The Mayor adjourned the meeting for a Mayoral Update; the Reports of the County and District Councillors - and Public Questions/Contributions. (See APPENDIX).

The meeting reconvened.

29 RYE HIRE, CYPRUS PLACE

Members were invited to agree a strategy to garner opposition to Rother District Council's plan for a housing development on the site.

The Mayor invited the owner of Rye Hire (RH), Andy Polley to address the meeting:

- He appreciated the support from the community and RTC.
- RH has traded at Cyprus Place for 27 years.
- Ben Hook (RDC) has advised that RDC could possibly provide assistance with relocation costs.
- Sussex Relocate visited last week.
- The EA has few site options.
- The Merchant & Mills site in Winchelsea Road site might be suitable – but there is considerable interest.
- There is nothing suitable at Rastrums or Atlas.

- Rye Hire is now on a rolling monthly contract.

The Clerk summarised the supporting paper.

Comments included:

- The retained firefighters retained by Rye Hire need to be close to the Fire Station.
- RH does not know if it will be trading at Cyprus Place from one month to the next – RDC should be asked to guarantee that Rye Hire can stay on site until suitable premises are found.
- RH supports hundreds of businesses in Rye & District.
- The hire service is particularly valued.
- From an environmental perspective, a town centre location is preferable to an out-of-town one.
- The loss of commercial premises to residential use should be resisted.
- The former TG school playing field is clearly a more suitable site for housing.
- RH supports 4 wte and 2 pte jobs.

Cllr Norton advised that he has huge sympathy for RH's plight and has liaised with Graham Burgess – which may have lead to the (rolling) lease extension. He would discuss the situation with Cllr Vine-Hall tomorrow.

RESOLVED (unanimous)To:

1 Ask RDC Planning why it had, apparently, dismissed RTC's observation that the relocation of Rye Hire conflicts with both the RNP (Policy B1 (p50) states: *Existing employment and business floor space will be safeguarded unless it can be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the LPA that the premises are no longer suitable for employment . . .* and the DaSA – which supports the retention of sites of economic value (subject to businesses being financially viable).

2 Seek advice on the above from specialist solicitors.

3 Distribute (via *Fixtures* and social media) a flyer highlighting Rye Hire's situation and encouraging parishioners, businesses etc to make representations to Cllr Doug Oliver (Leader) - Christine Baylis (regeneration) and Jonathan Vine-Hall (planning).

4 Lobby each individual Member of RDC.

Clerk

26 LOAN REQUEST

Members were invited to consider a request that:

- a) The Rye Gibbet Cage be loaned to the National Maritime Museum (Falmouth) and the Royal Museums Greenwich for public exhibition March 2023-December 2025/January 2026.
- b) Permission be given to measure the cage so that a replica may be made and tour the country thereafter.

The Clerk advised that a visit to the Gibbet Cage (normally) forms part of Paul Goring's Town Tour.

RESOLVED 1 (unanimous) (In respect of the requested loan of the actual Gibbet Cage) To put the points made by Cllr Kirkham to the National Maritime Museum – and to check that the Museum would be happy to comply with the best practice set out in *Smarter Loans – principles for lending and borrowing from UK museums* (prior to reconsidering the request).

RESOLVED 2 (unanimous) To advise the National Maritime Museum that RTC has no objection to it making a copy of the Gibbet Cage. Clerk

27 AFFORDABLE HOUSING WORKING GROUP

RESOLVED To appoint Cllr Rivett as a member.

28 COVID-19: COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Members noted that:

- i) The Clerk's additional* delegated decision making powers expired on 31 August 2021;
- ii) The Government has yet to publish its response to the local authorities remote meetings consultation;
- iii) COVID-19 transmission rates nationally remain high – and were expected to rise during September.
- iv) Organisations/Employers remain responsible for carrying out regular COVID-19 risk assessments and for determining what mitigation measures are appropriate for their activities.

**The Clerk's power to determine the Council's view on planning applications (whenever the Planning & Townscape Committee is not meeting prior to a response deadline) is permanent.*

(In the context of its duty of care towards its staff, Members and members of the public) Members were asked to consider the Council's approach to decision-making in the short term.

RESOLVED 1 That, whilst transmission rates remain high, with the exception of the Personnel Committee, (necessary) RTC 'in person' Council/Committee meetings should be held at RCC.

RESOLVED 2 That the Clerk be authorised to be make decisions on behalf of the Council if a majority of Members agree that an additional 'in person' Council meeting is not necessary – and that the Clerk has consulted Members informally prior to making the decision.

RESOLVED 3 That Council meetings should not be robed unless the purpose of the meeting is to award an Honorary Freemanship.

RESOLVED 4 That a robed Council meeting be arranged to consider the pending Honorary Freeman nomination – and to present a scroll to the previous nominee.

RESOLVED 5 That 'in person' Planning & Townscape Committee meetings should alternate, every 2 weeks, with (public) informal meetings of Members of the Committee via Zoom.

RESOLVED 6 To review the arrangements for Council/Committee meetings at every Council meeting.

Clerk

30 AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Members noted the paper prepared by Colonel Kimber for the Affordable Housing WG – and the possible actions arising from/suggested following a meeting of the Affordable Housing WG – and were asked to consider how to progress the provision of affordable housing within the Parish.

Colonel Kimber highlighted:

- The estimated need for additional social housing units is 20-30.
- The provision of more social/affordable housing is a key plank of the RNP.
- There are unlikely to be many suitable sites for this purpose, other than those identified within the RNP.
- The greatest potential for securing a reasonable number – perhaps 20-25 - of affordable/social units in the not-too-distant future is the TGCC site.
- Alliance Homes (Rother) has offered to explore whether a social housing provider might be prepared to take on the (seemingly land banked) Lower School site.
- Martello has the lease on the former Freda Gardham school.

He had asked RDC if it is party to one of the Strategic Housing Partnerships that is benefitting from £8.6bn of Government funding.

He added that the Government has started using the *term* 'first homes' to describe specific kinds of discounted market sale housing (that meet affordable criteria).

Comments included: RTC could calculate how much it would need to add to the precept in order to have a financial stake in any affordable housing scheme at TGCC; increasing RTC's housing stock further is likely to have VAT recovery implications.

RESOLVED 1 (Given that locals being priced out of housing accommodation is a nationwide issue) To ask the Mayor to request that Sally-Ann Hart raises this matter with her housing colleagues.

RESOLVED 2 To explore (again) whether there are any practical steps that could be taken to restrict the number of second homes/holiday lets/Airbnbs.

RESOLVED 3 To approach those who might be able to provide land for affordable accommodation.

RESOLVED 4 To ask the Rye Partnership to convene (any format) a stakeholders' meeting so that it might update them on its current activities and plans.

Clerk

31 FINANCE

a) Expenditure

RESOLVED To receive and note the Expenditure by Supplier Report as at 31 July 2021.

b) Budget Monitor

RESOLVED To receive and note the monitor as at 31 July 2021.

c) Account Balances

RESOLVED To receive and note the Account Balances as at 31 July 2021.

d) Earmarked Reserves

RESOLVED To receive and note the Earmarked Reserves as at 31 July 2021.

32 CPE (ROTHER)

The Clerk advised that the formal review of the Rother scheme by ESCC would commence in October 2021.

The Mayor advised that ESCC's contractor has started already to gather information – with numerous visits having been observed in Tillingham Avenue. She was aware that a number of residents in Military Road have been discussing extending the Rye scheme – as well as residents' permits. RTC could consider alerting residents in Military Road and North Salts to the review by way of a flyer – and via *Rye News*.

Cllr Rogers observed that there do not appear to be as many CPE officers in Rye.

This was to be expected: fine revenue will have dropped and RDC agreed to support the introduction of CPE on the condition that it should not be subsidised via Council Tax.

The meeting ended at 7.50pm.

Date Chairman

ADJOURNMENT**a) Mayoral Update**

Cllr Gilbert reported that:

- With some reluctance, it had been necessary to cancel this year's Sea Festival (RTC's grant would be put towards next year's).
- She had attended memorial services for Priscilla Ryan and Clifford Jordan; the Flower & Vegetable Show and a Thank You Reception at the Vaccination Centre.
- A sponsored walk and concert in aid of her Mayoral charities raised c£3,000.
- Cllr Creaser had stepped down from the Planning & Townscape Committee.

b) Reports of the Rye District Councillors**Cllr Howard Norton**

- RDC has been preoccupied with COVID-19 mitigation within the District – including the distribution of Government grants (a further £700,000 will be distributed over the next couple of weeks).
- Cllr Christine Bayliss (Regeneration portfolio) and Melanie Powell (Principal Regeneration Officer) are arranging visits to Rye to talk to business leaders – in order to help target grant funding.
- There is a possibility of Pontins being used to help accommodate Afghan refugees.
- RDC is committed to tackling climate change and considers this when making decisions generally - and strives to ensure that its policies are supportive.
- RDC will be sharing a Climate Emergency Officer with HBC.
- The Better Buses Campaign seeks to persuade operators to invest in EVs.
- Malcolm Johnston's CEO appointment has been confirmed.
- Following the Planning function review, the Planning Service is being overhauled. Capita has been appointed to deal with the planning applications backlog.
- Now that Bexhill Town Council has been established it is hoped that the rural parishes will get more attention from RDC.
- Alliance Homes (Rother) is committed to building better quality homes – including affordable ones. However, given that much of Rother is protected it is difficult to identify suitable sites.
- The Blackfriars development in Battle will see the construction of 200 new homes – many of them affordable.
- RDC is endeavouring to get everyone who is registered homeless out of B&B and into flats – with social support.

Cllr Creaser *How many of the homes at Blackfriars will be affordable?*

Cllr Norton At least 20%. He was aware of the problem of developers getting out of providing any affordable homes by making the case that, by being required to do so, would render the development unviable.

Cllr Boyd *Is Planning to be fully staffed?*

Cllr Norton That is RDC's intention.

Cllr Fiddimore *Is it possible for the proportion of homes to be constructed by Alliance Homes (Rother) to be 100%?*

Cllr Norton He would enquire.

Cllr Lord Ampthill *Concern about climate change is 'cross party'. Aside from those associated with the Rother Alliance, are other Members supportive? What is the recent £700,000 Government grant to be used for? Is it not the case that the latest re-organisation takes RDC back to a management structure (CEO plus two directors) that was in place 15 years ago?*

Cllr Norton He was unable to speak on behalf of his Conservative colleagues. He hoped the distribution of the £700,000 would be undertaken in consultation with stakeholders (lead by Cllr Bayliss and Melanie Powell). The Alliance was pleased with the restructuring thus far.

Cllr Bookless The shortage of planning officers and its impact on the performance of the Planning department is concerning. Why was RDC not pursuing the installation of EV charging points in car parks?

Cllr Norton Cllr Kathryn Field is overseeing the drafting of a Rother EV strategy – which will include charging points in suitable RDC car parks.

The Mayor added that a RDC officer had met with Rye stakeholders to discuss an EV strategy for Rye nearly a year ago. A paper was due to be presented to Cabinet but was 'pulled'.

Cllr Norton advised that he would seek a progress report.

Cllr Norton

c) Report of the County Councillor

There was no report. The Mayor suggested that, if anyone had a question for Cllr Glazier, it should be emailed to the Clerk.

d) Public Questions/Contributions

Colonel Kimber reported that, just 2 weeks ago, he was working with Tim Hickling (Head of Planning) and Ben Hook (AHR Director). Tim had since left and he was unclear about who he should be dealing with (necessary to re-engage on the affordable homes issue).

He would like to know (from Cllr Glazier):

- (i) The future of the former TG Green School site. (Cllr Glazier mentioned there were plans for it 2-3 years ago.)
- (ii) What – if anything – is likely to come out of the feasibility study (that few people appear to have seen) that looked at Rock Channel East?

- and from RDC: Is there now a Rother EV strategy?