

# ***RYE CONSERVATION SOCIETY***

## ***OFFICERS, COMMITTEE MEMBERS, CONSULTANTS AND TRUSTEES 2020***

**President** (vacant)

### **Vice-Presidents**

Kenneth Bird

### **Executive Officers**

David Bookless, Chairman; 01797 224650, *drbookless@gmail.com*

Tim Gorman, Hon Secretary; 01797225772, *gormantimothyj@outlook.com*

Julian Lockett, Vice Chairman; 01797 252114, *millhousenorthiam@sky.com*

Diana Hajikakou, Hon Treasurer; 01797 224046, *kyriacos2010@hotmail.co.uk*

Wayne Jones, Planning Liaison; 01797 229795, *waynethurstonjones@me.com*

Andy Stuart, Publicity & Membership Secretary; 01797 223831, *nikiandandy@hotmail.co.uk*

### **Executive Committee Members**

Mike Stott

224614, *mstott@btinternet.com*

Allan Thomson

07971 785492 *allan.r.thomson@gmail.com*

John Spencer

07957 971331, *jds@winsea.plus.com*

Col Colkins

*colkins@btinternet.com*

### **Planning Committee Members**

Julian Lockett, Chairman

Alan Dickinson

Rae Festing

Wayne Jones

Mike Stott

### **Honorary Consultant**

Alan Dickinson

Historical

### **Trustees:**

David Bookless

Diana Hajikakou

Andy Stuart

### **Rye Town Councillors:**

David Bookless and Andy Stuart are members of Rye Town Council

*Front cover Photos: RCS Award winners 2021: Ashbees 100, Rye Bank Gallery, Rye Hub on the Hill, Outside Inn and Tatner's Kitchen.*

# **RYE CONSERVATION SOCIETY**

## **NOTICE OF THE FORTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING to be held in The St Mary's Centre, Rye, at 11.15am on Friday 26 November 2021 (See Note 4)**

### **AGENDA**

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the AGM held on 17 May 2019
3. Matters arising
4. Reports from the Chairman and Officers; other reports
5. Treasurer's Report and approval of Accounts for the year 2020 (Section 2.4)
6. Elections: Executive Officers and Committee Members. (See note 1)  
The Committee wishes to re-appoint Kenneth Bird as Vice-President.
7. Resolution: Committee proposes to update the Constitution of the Society to adopt a new form of governance creating a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) in accordance with Charity Commission guidelines and report recommendations for approval at the next AGM in 2022. (Note this change would bring the Society into line with other similar bodies.)
8. Any Other Business (see note 2)

### **Notes**

1. Any member who wishes to nominate another member for the Executive Committee should apply to the Hon Secretary for a nomination form, which must be returned to him at least fourteen days before the meeting.
2. Any member wishing to raise a matter under Any Other Business must notify the Hon Secretary at least fourteen days before the meeting.
3. Please bring your copy of this report with you to the AGM as spare copies may not be available.
4. Please follow all Covid rules as displayed in the Hall, do not attend if feeling unwell and bring a mask. Sanitiser will be available at entrance, you may need warm clothing.

*Timothy Gorman Hon Secretary  
2 Jeake Drive  
Rye  
East Sussex TN31 7FH  
01797 225772  
email: ryeconservation@gmail.com*

# Rye Conservation Society Forty-Seventh Annual Report for 2020/21

## 1 Chairman's Report *by David Bookless*

For the second year I am writing these notes while the country still suffers from the pandemic but at last it seems that matters are improving thanks to the roll out of the vaccine. The pandemic has greatly curtailed the activities of the Conservation Society and restricted face to face contacts and meetings. Even now our Executive Committee only meets via Zoom which I feel somewhat restricts debate and discussion. However I very much hope that we can hold an AGM in the St Mary's Centre on Friday 26 November to be followed by a Mermaid Lunch for members and guests. The lunch numbers will be restricted a little, but I am hoping that we can still have a good social event.

This Report will give a flavour of our activity since our last AGM eighteen months ago. The Committee has since June 2020 maintained monthly Zoom meetings to consider amongst other things local planning applications, planning policy and transport issues. We were unable to hold a 2020 Christmas Party, but Mike Stott designed an excellent unusual Christmas card which was distributed to members and we issued regular Newsletters to update members on local issues that we have been discussing. I am grateful to Ian at our local printers Adams who has printed our material for us. A sign that we might be coming back to more normality was our ability to hold a Summer Garden Party with a healthy gathering of members and at which we attracted six new members. The sun shone and thanks to Andy and Nikki we had the use of their lovely garden, ideal for the cream teas and Pimms.

We gave five Awards for buildings of merit in the town, of very different types and more details are given later in this Report. I believe that it is a useful function of the Society to encourage good practice with developments and conversions. In Rye we are most fortunate to have such a lovely townscape and our prime purpose is to encourage people to cherish what we have and look after our inheritance. We believe that our Award winners are all in different ways a credit to the town.

I am grateful to our local on line newspaper, Rye News which has supported us by publicising our activity regularly during the year, including a feature on the Awards. The Society is approaching its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and Allan Thomson, researching through our archives has produced a useful history of our activities which I believe shows that we have been an important good influence on the development of Rye. I decided that it would be of interest to members to include this history in the Annual Report.

At least during the pandemic we were able to keep our web site up to date and on it you can find details via the link to Rother District Council of all current planning proposals. Our monthly comments on these proposals are also posted together with more in depth comments on the more important issues.

The Society has around 230 members which is a good number for a relatively small place, but it has been difficult to build up membership whilst people have been isolated and at home. Also we have not been able to organise the visits which are a popular feature of our membership, it was on one of those that I first got involved with the organisation. We will be looking at ways of increasing membership numbers over the coming year. However as with other local organisations we always need more people to get actively involved. We face a loss

of some stalwart committee members in Julian Lockett, our Vice Chairman and Chair of Planning, Allan Thomson who has covered Roads and Parking issues, but also helped in numerous other ways and Wayne Jones, our Liaison man with the Rother Council. I thank them and all the Committee for their efforts during these unusual times.

We get a number of comments about the colour schemes chosen for buildings in the town. Generally we prefer buildings to be repainted in the same colour, particularly within the Conservation Area. Within the conservation Area, a colour change needs planning permission. Clearly this is not just a local problem, as evidenced by this cartoon in a recent issue of Private Eye. (*Adapted and reproduced with permission from Private Eye*). A later letter writer wrote that in Tudor times coloured daub was often used and that the black and white that we see today was introduced in Victorian times, so the arguments can continue.



*"He says that he's from the Rye Conservation Society and would like a quiet word"*

I would like to remember in these notes three key contributors to the Society who have passed away in the past year. Priscilla Ryan a long term active and generous supporter of our work who attended most of our gatherings and was a fount of stories about Rye and its people. Pamela Buxton, my neighbour and friend and also long time supporter of our work with her lovely garden in the Mint and her late flourishing career as an author writing as Pam Holloway and last but not least John Pope who served on our planning committee for many years and as our vice president gave us much good advice at difficult times.

On a personal note, some of you may know that I was ill in hospital for four months last year and am still not at full speed although considerably better than I thought likely a year ago. I feel that I should be handing over the Chairman role either now or not too soon after the AGM as I am not able to deal with everything as I would wish. I hope that in due course I can still take a more back seat role assisting my successor.

## **2 Membership and Publicity** *by Andy Stuart*

Not surprisingly it has been a quiet period on the membership front, since all the society's normal social activity - annual Christmas gathering at the Town Hall, annual summertime garden party and a selection of outings – were all shelved during the period of this report.

So the Society is very grateful for all those Members who pay their subscriptions on an annual basis who continued to make their payment to the Society's coffers, as well as new Members who have signed up – we are very grateful to you and all the Life Members.

I would like to thank our chairman for his industry in putting together occasional newsletters (as well as this report) – writing the greater part of each edition, laying out and subbing the copy and liaising with the printers – Adams of Rye. David Bookless is very much Hugh Cudlipp meets Neville Brody laced with Nikolaus Pevsner and Ash Sarkar. Thanks also to all the contributors, with Julian Lockett and Allan Thomson being foremost in this matter, and our wonderful team of distributors who pound the pavements stuffing David's finished product through letterboxes – Anne Wood, Tim Gorman, Allan Thomson, Denny Nicol and Diana Hajikakou being prominent.

Sadly, during the period we have lost a number of Members, including our former chairman John Griffiths. We send our condolences and best wishes to John's family and friends and also the family and friends of all our other Members who have passed away.

Andy Stuart  
Publicity and Membership Secretary

## **3 Treasurer's Report** *by Diana Hajikakou.*

During the period covered by this report there were no social events, outings or activities. This may be the reason for a reduction in the amount received in membership fees. Fortunately, despite this, the Society remains in a satisfactory financial position with money in reserve for contingencies or one-off expenditure.

The Society thanks the Independent Examiner David Andrews for examining the accounts and records supplied.

The Accounts and balance sheet as of 31st December, 2020 appear on the following page:

**RYE CONSERVATION SOCIETY**  
**Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2020**

<b>Income</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019</b>
Events & outings	-	1164.00
Subscriptions	830.00	1127.00
Donations	19.00	-
Gift Aid	125.31	171.08
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>974.31</b>	<b>3042.05</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Events & Outings	-	1164.00
Affiliation fees	94.00	174.00
Insurance	212.80	212.80
Printing/Stationery	327.73	425.77
Post/telephone	43.31	311.76
Administration (website)	360.00	321.14
AGM/Awards	-	1415.00
Sundries	17.00	503.25
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>1054.84</b>	<b>4527.72</b>
Net Surplus/Deficit for the year	-80.53	-1485.67
<b>Balance Sheet at 31<sup>st</sup> December</b>	<b>2020 £</b>	<b>2019 £</b>
<b>Funds at Bank</b>		
Treasurers Account	21,002.53	21,083.06
<b>Represented by</b>		
Reserves brought forward	21,083.06	22,568.73
Surplus/Deficit for year	-80.53	-1,485.67
	<b>21,002.53</b>	<b>21,083.06</b>

The Committee of the Rye Conservation Society approve the Balance Sheet and Income and Expenditure accounts for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020

I have examined the Income and Expenditure Account of the Rye Conservation Society for the year ended 31 December 2020 and have compared them with the records supplied. In my opinion they are in accordance with those records.

*David Andrews*

David Andrews ACIB, MCICM, FCT  
Partner - Chatswood Associates (Accountants)  
Abingworth, New England Lane, Rye, East Sussex TN31 7NT

## **4 Planning in the time of Covid** *by Julian Luckett, Chairman Planning Committee*

Because of the disruption caused by the pandemic, the last Annual Report covered the period to August 2020. Since then consent has been granted for the Martello developments of Sandrock Marine on Rock Channel, but the applications to develop The Globe on Military Road were refused, mainly due to lack of adequate parking.

The application for new housing along Mill Lane was refused and has now been appealed by the developer, whilst the refurbishment of the Old Granary on Ferry Road has commenced with the cleaned brickwork recently exposed. Although the loss of part of the historic cast-iron framework is to be regretted, externally the refurbished building will be a significant improvement in this part of Rye.

It was hoped that work on the Bridge Point Studios would begin this year. However a new application has been submitted for changes primarily to the roofscape which has resulted either from a value management exercise or a desire to provide a 'black box' by omitting the roof lights that were a prominent feature of the approved scheme. We are concerned that the Martello website is now marketing the scheme as a film production studio which is not the concept that was granted consent. It is our view, which we have made clear to Rother, that this will require a change of use.

Since consent for the Plutus development of the Thomas Peacocke site was granted in December 2020, nothing has happened, either in terms of detailed drawings or activity on the site. The developer has until December 2023, after which he will have to resubmit the application.

Applications have been submitted for both the NatWest and Barclays Bank buildings for a change to residential, either totally or with a commercial element retained on the ground floor. We have supported both of these applications, as it will retain life along the High Street.

Throughout this last year work has proceeded on the reinstatement of The George although it was only in July that detailed drawings covering the works were published on the Rother Planning website. To date, no consent for the majority of the works has been granted by Rother.

This highlights the deplorable state of Rother's Planning Department. Due to lack of funding from central government over the past decade and the need to focus local spending on social care, the Planning Department has been chronically under-resourced. Staff numbers have been reduced which has led to increased pressure on the remaining staff. This in turn has resulted in the loss of senior staff and difficulty in recruiting and retaining new planners.

There are now considerable delays to deciding applications together with a halt to pre-application advice and a dramatic reduction in the scope of enforcement action. It had got to the point that even Rother councillors were admitting that the service was not 'fit for purpose'. Rother's new chief executive, Malcolm Edwards, instigated an external review of the service, has set in train a new senior management structure and brought in an outside consultancy to help address the delays and backlog. However the issues will not be overcome overnight, it will take a couple of years assuming Rother provides the necessary funds and management backing.

## **5**     *Planning Liaison Report* by Wayne Jones

The Society monitors, where possible, infringements of planning laws that negatively impact on the appearance of the town and the relevant buildings. This has been especially the case over the last six months as the lockdown has resulted in several such infringements, some quite blatant.

However, we continue to be indebted to Dan Bevan, the Rother planning liaison officer, with whom we have a productive mutually beneficial relationship and is consequently investigating several planning breaches.

We are happy to informally communicate with property owners and businesses about the rules and the planning requirements, but would recommend in the first instance a look at the Rother District Council web site which contains full details of all current and previous planning applications in the Rother District together with comments from members of the public and statutory bodies such as the Environment Agency.

## **6**     *Conservation Society Awards for 2020*

During Lockdown we were pleased to note a number of excellent refurbishments of buildings on the High Street and excellent design elsewhere so that we were able to announce five winners of our Awards to be presented at our Garden party. The winners as agreed by the committee were for the following pictured on on the cover of this report.

**The Rye Hub on the Hill** A health care complex of 5 buildings on one site, offering a range of services. The Hub on Rye Hill provides a new cutting-edge community wellbeing centre. The Hub opened last August and has drawn much praise from local users. It seems to us to blend with the landscape and provide a much needed range of services and an attractive café.

**The Rye Bank Art Gallery**, a beautifully refurbished space in the old HSBC Bank and an attractive addition to the range of galleries in the High Street.

**The Inside Out Bar** at the Landgate. A refurbishment of John Bragg's long established Antique shop. The bar space has been sympathetically restored and provides a wonderful close view of the Landgate.

**The Old Ashbees** shop. The external restoration which has kept the signage and frontage of the old butchers, including the brass fittings is an excellent example of a High Street restoration for a new use.

**Tatners ex the Old Forge** This too is a fine example of a change of use, in this case from an antique shop to a restaurant. Many members will recall it as the Old Forge which was famous for grilled steaks. It now has an excellent diner menu in unusual surroundings.

## 7 *Affiliations*

The Society is affiliated to the *Campaign for the Preservation of Rural England* (CPRE).

The CPRE has campaigned against aspects of the proposed planning changes which would have relaxed some planning restrictions, the organisation was pleased that the Government has recently paused these proposals.

Commenting on this reported rethink of the government's planning proposals, Tom Fyans, the deputy chief executive, said:

'The devil will be in the detail, but it looks as though some of the most damaging proposals of what was a top-down developers' charter have been rightly binned. However, the government must not shy away from overhauling a tired planning system to make it fit for the multiple challenges of the 21st century.'

'Local communities need a stronger right to be heard in local decisions; brownfield sites must automatically be developed first to help protect local green spaces and our Green Belts in the fight against climate change; and young people and key workers desperately need more funding for rural affordable homes.'

'Positive changes to the planning system are long overdue – in future, it's vital local communities are empowered to protect their precious green spaces while delivering the affordable homes they desperately need and, at the same time, responding to the climate emergency by regenerating the countryside.'

'This decision by ministers is a victory for common sense and local campaigners all across the country who just wanted a proper say on the needs of their communities and how their area should be developed. We look forward to working with the government on creating a planning system that puts the needs of local communities ahead of developer's profits.'

The CPRE would seem to be in favour of local decision making and Rye's Neighbourhood Plan is an excellent example of local involvement with a Plan steering group producing the NP and then campaigning successfully for it to be adopted by local vote.

The Society is also affiliated to the *Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings* .

"SPAB is involved in all aspects of the survival of buildings which are old and interesting. Our principal concern is the nature of their 'restoration' or 'repair', because misguided work can be extremely destructive. To us the skill lies in mending them with the minimum loss of fabric and so of romance and authenticity. Old buildings cannot be preserved by making them new. In the architectural context 'restoration' means work intended to return an old building to a perfect state. It can be the unnecessary renewal of worn features or the hypothetical reconstruction of whole or missing elements; in either case tidy reproduction is achieved at the expense of genuine but imperfect work. William Morris founded the SPAB in 1877 to defend old buildings from this treatment. He saw that the most vulnerable buildings were those of most eloquent craftsmanship, survivors from a time before mass-production took hold. In the manifesto which he wrote for the new Society, and which guides our work to this day, he put the strongest case against their restoration, proposing instead a policy of skilful repair."

## 8 *The First 500 AND COUNTING - a short history of the Society*

The Rye Conservation Society was established to oversee all matters related to the built environment of this vibrant, historic and unique town, something it has done with enthusiasm and dedication since it was established in the early 1970s. During 2020 and into 2021, the Society's Executive Committee has continued to meet on-line and did so, for the 500th meeting in March this year. A bigger celebration will be more appropriate for the Society's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2023, however, a recent review of the Society's archives; another lockdown activity, has created an excellent opportunity to review and to sum-up a short history of the Society, its activities and the fortunes of the town of Rye observed by the Committee over the five decades. An excellent summary of the Society's first twenty years, authored by Peter Howlett, was published in the Rye and Battle Observer over a number of months in the early 1990s. This '48 year' summary is shorter and will concentrate on the more recent decades up to the present.

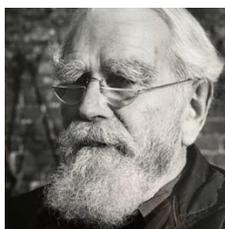
### 1. Where it all started

The origins of the Rye Preservation Society, its name until 1979, came about as 900 years of 'independence' in local planning powers was coming to an end through a local government reorganisation. This meant the end of Rye Borough Council and the transfer of planning decisions to the new Rother District Council. The 'founder' Chairman of the Society was Rye's then Mayor, Dr Alec Vidler who, as president and vice-president, remained an active part of the society for the rest of his long life. The Society's aim was to provide a strong 'local feeling' to planning considerations which were decided upon by the 'remote' District and County Council planning committees. The Society sought to ensure that planning applications, as well as the newly formulated local and structure plans that provided a framework for them, would address Rye's needs.

The first Preservation Society Executive Committee was on 12th February 1973. An early 'invitation to join' leaflet stated:

*"The Society does not wish Rye to become a lifeless collection of old buildings. We are convinced that numerous trades and industries, both large and small, should flourish here – as they have always done. Nor should Rye be kept quiet and unspoilt just for the residents and those who work here. It must continue to attract and welcome friends and admirers from all over the world"*

This statement remained closely aligned with the Society's objectives throughout the decades that followed and remains relevant to this day.



*The Reverend Dr. Alec Vidler, D.Litt  
Mayor of Rye 1972-74  
Founder Chairman, Rye Conservation Society  
1973*

In August 1974 Rye's Conservation Area was designated as being of 'outstanding architectural and historic interest' further bolstering the role of the Society. In addition to planning matters the Society set out to be active in promoting improvements to the local environment through the preservation of historic buildings, promoting footpaths, ensuring

tree preservation, and even through organising litter picks. In June 1973 the Society presented its first annual report and accounts at its first AGM.

## 2. The early years 1973-1979

### The Society

Col. E.J.C. Foster took over as Chair in 1976. As the Society developed, aside from the usual Chair, Finance and Honorary Secretary roles, the role of ‘consultant’ members of the Executive Committee emerged, a practice that has continued to this day. This includes members who provide expertise and focus on Legal, Architectural, Historical or Maritime matters. Often a Committee Member would lead in liaison with specific District and County Council officers as the Society sought to strengthen its relationship with the local authorities and with other civic groups and societies.

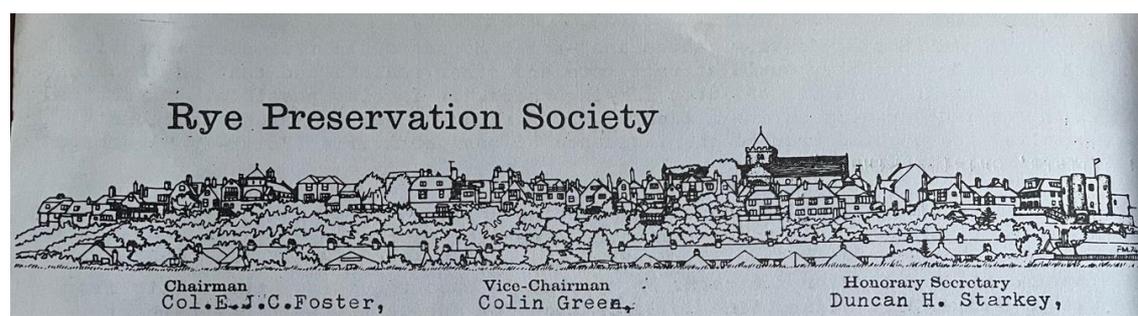
### Context and key issues

In what has become a perennial issue, the Society raised concerns about the riverside areas along Rock Channel and Rye Harbour Road. The Society “deplored the lack of policy and piecemeal development” and the deterioration of a “beautiful, tranquil and historic landscape to a scene of ugliness, noise and pollution”. To counter this the Society published a set of ‘General Principles’ to guide any future development.

Then, as now, the management of road traffic was an issue. The Society worked with stakeholders on a proposed ‘Remedy for Rye’ traffic management proposal in 1975. The initiative foundered as the proposed weekend restrictions on vehicle entry to the town centre via the Landgate was not acceptable to some.

The first East Sussex County level strategic ‘Structure’ plan arrived in 1977 where the absence of a by-pass for Rye was raised as an issue by the Society. Early consultation on a by-pass duly followed when the Society favoured a ‘diversionary’ route inland of Rye.

Through the early years battling continued over the ownership and maintenance of the town’s ancient monuments including the Ypres and Landgate towers. These were transferred to Rother District Council (RDC) in 1976 with repairs taking place in 1978.



*Letter-head from the early ‘Preservation’ days*

### Planning and development

In the early years the Society opposed proposals to redevelop the former Regent Cinema on Cinque Ports St, making strong arguments that community uses should feature.

The Society also opposed large residential developments on green land at Mountsfield and Cadborough farm. During this period the Society gave its support to modern warehouse development by Alsford’s on Rye Harbour Road and it provided support for

the development of proposals for sheltered housing for the elderly on Turkey Cock Lane which, in 1981, opened as Devonport House.

### **Heritage and town amenity**

The Society had campaigned about the adequacy of public toilet facilities which, by 1978, saw plans for facilities at Rope Walk, Gun Garden and The Strand proceed. The Society also sponsored the restoration and reinstatement of a Georgian balustrade at the Town Hall.

## **3. Preservation to Conservation 1979-1992**

### **The Society**

In 1979 the Society's newly appointed Chair, Sir Brian Batsford, set in train re-launch of the Society with a new name, Rye Conservation Society (RCS), and a recruitment drive with 4,000 leaflets distributed and the appointment of five new Vice-Presidents, amongst them the celebrated writer and conservationist, Sir John Betjeman. By now, membership of the society exceeded 350. In 1983 Mr Alan Crick took over as the Society's Chair. During this period the Society had set into a pattern of active social engagement with a regular programme of winter lectures; summer outings to places of historical and architectural interest; and bi-annual social gatherings in Lamb House gardens in the summer and at the Town Hall in the run-up to Christmas.

### **Context and key Issues**

The RCS campaigned on several significant planning issues through these years. The Society pressed the local authorities to consider the future role and viable functioning of the town centre as a shopping centre and were engaged in the continued debate on supermarkets and their appropriate role within an historic market town. Allied to this was Rye's role as a tourist destination and finding the right balance between visitors and residents. To avoid the pitfalls of catering to mass, peak season tourism the Society favoured a view of attracting the "discerning year-round visitor".

The need for a strategic overview of transport issues, in particular the management of parking and how best to address growing traffic including crossings, junction improvements and by-pass proposals continued to concern the town and the Society.

The Society continued to press for more effective custodianship of the town's ancient monuments and the historic warehouse buildings on The Strand which had continued to deteriorate through this period. Turning to the waterfront, securing more effective management of and investment in Rye Harbour was an on-going issue. There were concerns that the harbour was being poorly managed with assets left to dereliction by the Southern Water Authority (SWA). Fit-for-purpose 'floating' moorings remained an aspiration. SWA invested in what they were good at, i.e., in water management and flood defences such as installations at Scots Float and Northpoint. Related to this, the Society continued to press for a cogent planning framework for the Rye waterfront, in particular around Rock Channel, then considered Rye's "ugly duckling" area.

### **Planning and Development**

At the start of this period the Society made extensive input to the 1979 County Structure Plan securing amendments on issues such as ensuring reference to a by-pass. The Society campaigned to control tourism excesses, e.g., objecting to an application for a caravan

park on the Lower School site which was refused as were applications for amusement arcades.

Supermarkets were an on-going issue, specifically whether one was welcome and, if so, how big and at what price to the towns existing retailers. A small supermarket had been proposed for the Regent Cinema site and debate continued for a number of years on appropriate uses and how to secure benefits for the community, such as providing a Tourist Information Centre. Concurrently there were emerging proposals for development of the Station Approach with multi-level parking, a large new supermarket and demolition of historic buildings. On this, the Society embarked on an unsuccessful attempt to save a Victorian goods shed which was demolished in 1983, however, a major achievement for the Society was securing the listing of the station. Eventually the parking elements were scaled back whilst some architectural features of the shed were salvaged for re-use on the Kent & East Sussex Railway.

During this period by-pass proposals for the town had started being worked up by the Department for Transport. The Society had long favoured a new road further inland to the north of the town, however, this was not included in the six options presented in 1984. The options were subsequently narrowed down to a new road running close to the railway, more a 'through-pass' than by-pass, which was widely considered to be a "cheap and nasty" option. To add to the already listed station, the Society successfully secured the additional listing of the Gatekeepers Cottage which was in the path of the proposed new road. The Royal Fine Arts Commission were approached by the Society and secured their powerful support against development that would harm the town. These efforts by the Society and the wider Rye Action Group were rewarded when the through-pass proposals were dropped in 1990 in favour of 'proper' by-pass.

Through the 1980s Rye Harbour Road was the focus of a number of significant development proposals and the Society commented extensively in pursuit of amendments to mitigate their impact on the town and its setting. This included a major Marina proposal at the Saltings incorporating other commercial and residential uses. There were neighbouring proposals to increase warehouse and industrial premises, including aggregate processing. These employment proposals were supported in principle by the Society, although the impact on Rye Harbour Road traffic was flagged up as The Society pressed for the by-pass to be built in order to deal with the traffic these developments would generate.

The Society welcomed arrival of the Strand Court development as a 'turn-around' for the regeneration of The Strand Quay area, where the Heritage Centre also opened providing a home for the Town Model's, before then, peripatetic existence.

In the early 1990s the Society commented extensively on Rother's Draft Local Plan which involved extensive engagement with council officers.

### **Heritage and Town Amenity**

The Society had embarked on a long-standing battle against unsightly signing and garish lighting and during this period unsuccessful attempts were made to have the Conservation area designated as an "area of special control". Instead, the Society did what it could to improve the situation by publishing and distributing 500 copies of "Planning Guidelines for Businesses in Rye". This was to alert and influence business owners to their responsibilities towards listed premises in the Conservation area.

The Society raised the alarm when the Grade II\* interior of the Apothecary disappeared as the building was being sold to a new owner. Following The Society's intervention, the interior was retrieved from an antique dealer and reinstated. Around the corner on Conduit Hill the Society advised on the stopping up and appropriate installation of railings for the benefit of the residents moving into Devonport House and also advised the local authority on the reinstatement of the Watchbell St viewing point.

The Society was involved in a long-running saga concerning the demolition, without consent, of a cottage named 'Wee Nestie' which was located behind the Ypres Castle Inn. The unauthorised demolition was raised with the authorities. However, whilst found to have acted illegally, no enforcement action was taken against the property owner. In the meantime, ground movement and landslides in the area had occurred. At the time this left Society members concerned about the 'clout' of the planning system to protect the Conservation area.



*Conduit Hill goes pedestrian friendly, stopped up and with railings, as advised by the Society.*

*The Monastery on the left, was for long a concern to the Society as a building at risk, thankfully now in the hands of an attentive custodian and unlike the listed cobbles whose maintenance remains patchy.*

The Society's Chair, as a resident of Lamb House, campaigned for the reinstatement of the historic Garden Room which had been destroyed in WWII bombing. The National Trust supported the campaign but, on the condition, fundraising was from American sources. It is clear the fundraising continues. On a smaller scale, but with more immediate success, the Society promoted and assisted in securing funding for the restoration of the pump on Landgate Square.

Since its founding, the Society had promoted the many fine footpaths around Rye by producing guides to them. In 1986, these guides were updated and issued under the new stewardship of the Ramblers Association. Back in Rye's streets, the Society continued a long-running campaign for the better maintenance of the listed cobbled streets and successfully secured a two-year rolling programme of skilful re-laying.

A key success for the Society during the mid 1980s concerned pollution from the solvent processing plant on Rye Harbour Road. Members of the Society were involved in monitoring and recording incidents of noxious fume emissions from the plant that were impacting the town. Following evidence gathering, liaison with the authorities and the plant's operator, the offending processes were discontinued and the air over the town has been relatively fresh ever since.

#### **4. Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century 1992-2010**

##### **The Society**

Outgoing Honorary Secretary Peter Howlett documented a serialised history of the first 20 years of the Society that appeared as a regular column in the Rye and Battle Observer. William Martin had been elected Chair in 1990 and through the 1990s there were between

350 and 400 members of the Society. In 1995 Paul Blomfeld became Chair where he would remain for the following 15 years. A vibrant social and educational programme continued throughout this period. The Society arranged exhibitions as part of the Rye Arts Festival whilst a diverse programme of annual winter lectures was arranged from organisations such as English Heritage, the Commission for Architecture and Built Environment and the Georgian Society. Summer outings included to places such as Charleston, Dover Castle, Eltham Palace as well as trips to London to Buckingham and Kensington Palaces and to the V&A. The last of the garden parties in Lamb House took place in 2005 and were then hosted by Rae Festing at her garden on the High Street.

In 1993 the Society launched a programme of Townscape Awards to recognise and applaud good practice in renovation, preservation and new development. The first diverse group of winners in 1994 included RDC, for the renovation of the Gun Garden area, restoration work to two businesses, Fletchers and Horrell's chemist and to two houses in Tilling Green. These awards were presented at the Christmas gathering and have become a feature of this annual event ever since. The Society embraced the internet age, launching its website at the 2009 AGM.



*Battle stations - the Townscape Award winning Gun Garden with sights trained over Rock Channel towards the 'strategic gap' battleground*

### Context and key issues

The biggest issue facing the Society during this period was the process towards the adoption of Rother District Council's Local Plan. RDC, in response to changes in nationwide planning legislation and associated government targets, were under pressure to allocate new housing land. For Rye, this included land outside the then designated development boundary to the south of Rock Channel and on Udimore Road. This had prompted strong local protest owing to the potential damage to the setting of the town and to the High Weald AONB. The Rock Channel site was, at the time, subject to a planning application for a large mixed-use development around a marina, a proposal which had RDC's support. The many objections that were raised both to this proposal and to the draft Local Plan led to a Local Planning Inquiry during 2004-5. At the Inquiry the Society presented a strong case involving much input from Committee Members and from specialist expert witnesses. This resulted in some success as the Inspector ruled that the land south of Rock Channel should not be developed and kept outside the development boundary. Housing on Udimore Road was to be included "only as a last resort", something that did come to pass when an application for homes on this site was approved later in this decade.

The control and supply of car parking continued as a point of debate as studies were commissioned amidst now familiar calls to expand controls and to re-direct traffic to less well used car park facilities. At this time Rye was growing rapidly as a weekend and day trip destination, prompting the formation of the Rye Town Forum to seek ways to better promote and manage the visitor experience.

Discussions concerning the A259 and by-pass continued with local conferences and consultation sessions held by the Department for Transport. Planning for the by-pass had settled on a southern route with a tunnel under the Rother, however, this was an expensive option and by the mid-1990s this by-pass proposal, along with that for Winchelsea, was finally abandoned. Following on from the construction of what is now Jempson's) at the Station Approach in the 1980s 'supermarket wars' were opened up on two new fronts during the 1990s as explained in the Planning section below.



*End of the road or a tunnel too far – the finally agreed but ultimately doomed A259 by-pass option*

Rye Harbour continued through a 'see-saw' of fortunes as shipping traffic dropped to historical lows, before picking up again with fewer, but larger, shipping movements to transport aggregates, timber and grain. This took place as stewardship of Rye Harbour passed from Southern Water to the Environment Agency, a transfer that did not allay concerns that the organisation in charge had limited interest in investing in the harbour as a viable commercial concern. Meantime significant investment in flood defences was made on the west bank of the harbour. Back onshore, the fortunes of Rye Harbour Road came to the fore as the area was earmarked by the County as a repository of all that East Sussex (and beyond) didn't want. A number of proposed schemes for general waste and recycling, wastewater, animal carcass processing and waste mineral dumping were submitted, and strongly resisted.

### Planning and Development

Throughout this period the Society's Planning Committee continued to review and comment on around 100 planning applications annually, of which in excess of 10% prompted significant interventions or objections from the Society.

In 1992 the Society objected to two big applications outside the development boundary to the east of Rye where, at Foreman's Mill, plans for a large park and ride and at East Guildford plans for a Car Boot sale were both refused.

The Society also objected to a proposal for 40 truck loads a day of waste minerals to be dumped in Castle Water. This was a prelude to a bigger proposal in 1995 for a Waste and Recycling Centre on Rye Harbour Road which was waved through approval by East Sussex County Council in the face of widespread local objection. The Society worked with other stakeholders to alert this to the Secretary of State who called in the application. A local inquiry was held in 1996 at which the application was finally refused in 1997. A further call-to-arms followed in 1996 as two separate wastewater and livestock waste processing proposals were, again, in danger of being waved through by East Sussex. Waste issues did not go away as the Society remained on alert as East Sussex continued to harbour a "heavy industrial" viewpoint on land uses at Rye Harbour.

In the late 90s supermarket proposals emerged for the Lower School site (Sainsburys), which followed earlier proposals for a supermarket at St Margaret's Terrace (Tesco). Neither proposal was supported by the Society.

Into the new millennium consents were granted for the windfarm on the marsh at Cheyne Court which, despite local misgivings, was approved and completed by 2008. A long running campaign by the Society resulted in Rother preparing a planning brief for the Rock Channel area, north of the river, in part prompted by the 'fallout' from the Local Plan Inquiry. An application for homes on the contested site at Udimore Road made a re-appearance and, whilst initially contested, secured the Society's support by the time detailed design was completed.

#### Heritage and town amenity

As the parking debate continued, the Society commissioned a survey, issuing 250 questionnaires, to households and businesses in the Citadel. This garnered support for an extension of residents parking. The Society supported an unsuccessful attempt to remove parking proposed for the area between the warehouses in Strand Quay. Meantime the Society continued to support the installation of pedestrian crossings in Cinque Ports Street and on Fishmarket Road as well as carrying out an audit of the road signs around the town which secured their rationalisation by East Sussex in 2003.

To mark the date, the Society was involved in the installation of the Millennium Wall, a relief artwork on the wall of the bridge over the Tillingham on Winchelsea Road.

In 2002 the Society published a Property Owners' Conservation Handbook; this was a compendium to the earlier guidelines for businesses published in the 90s and had a similar aim of alerting property owners to their responsibilities.

Aligned with its aims to manage the Conservation Area, the Society prompted maintenance works at the Old Grammar School on the High Street and in 2002 secured the listing of the Lion Street library. This building was, at the time, being promoted for residential redevelopment. The building had been transferred to Hastings College but was controversially put on the market by the college in 2009, despite originally 'belonging' to the town, which prompted a battle for it to continue in some form of community use [[link to Battle of Lion Street](#)].

A successful listing was requested and secured for the large warehouse on Tower Street in 2003. In 2008 the Society welcomed the purchase and restoration of eight derelict terrace houses on Fishmarket Road.

The Rye Partnership was formed during this period. Whilst deciding not to sit on the Steering Group, the Society was engaged in formulating the Partnership's works to floodlight the ancient monuments and to upgrade the Fishmarket area. Plans for a comprehensive redevelopment of Simmonds Quay were progressed by the Partnership.

During this period the Society fought against further advertising hoarding erected on Wish St, to add to the longer standing but similarly unwelcome advertising on station approach. Rother refused consent to this but lost out on appeal.



*Top listings:  
Rye station, signal box and shelters -  
but not the goods shed*

*Gatehouse on Rope Walk -  
the 'throughpass' roadblock*

*Tower St. warehouse*

## **5. The Conservation Society from 2010 to today**

### **The Society**

Following Paul Blomfeld's retirement, John Griffiths became the Chair of the Society in 2011, a role he continued until he became Life Long President in 2018. By the time of the 40<sup>th</sup> AGM in 2012 it was noted that the Society had become the 'go-to' organisation for numerous groups, businesses, professionals and authorities when seeking guidance on development proposals in the town. A varied social programme continued with regular trips and social gatherings and since losing the regular Lamb House location for the annual summer garden party it crossed West Street to the more convivial surroundings of Little Orchard House, kindly hosted by Andy Stuart our officer for Membership and Publicity. David Bookless became Chair of the Society in 2018, a role he continues to this day. The Society's on-line presence developed greatly during this period with a major web-site re-launch in 2017. This site is regularly updated and gives access to a wealth of Society information and reference material as well as links to other organisations with which the Society is affiliated. This does not, however, mean the end of the personal touch as regular newsletters and annual reports have continued to be delivered (often by hand) to our members. The Society has remained under a formal charitable set-up since 1973. As this is no longer fit for purpose it will be proposed to members that the Society converts to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) at a future Annual General Meeting.

### **Context and key issues**

Nationally, the Localism Bill paved the way for changes to planning legislation. Of specific concern was the ability of National Planning Frameworks to impose housing targets by demanding a five-year supply of housing land, an on-going issue that casts an ever-darkening shadow over Rye to this day. The new legislation also invited

communities to prepare a neighbourhood plan and, in 2013, Rye Town Council set up a Steering Group to lead the development and drafting of the Rye Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan sets out a vision of Rye as ‘a thriving town for the 21st Century’ and a number of planning policies are to be used in the determination of planning applications locally. In 2018 there was an extensive consultation process on the draft Plan by means of meetings and exhibitions. The Conservation Society submitted detailed comments, most of which have been incorporated in the final version of the plan. This was adopted following a referendum in 2019. The Rother Core Strategy was adopted in 2014 and the Society has continued to input in its development with comments in 2019 on the subsequent draft Site Allocation Plan.

With plans for an A259 by-pass receding, managing the traffic that continues to flow into and through the town has become a priority with the Society, who have engaged in various initiatives, most notably parking.

The setting of Rye continued to be threatened by decisions made outside the area. The expansion of Lydd airport was approved in 2013 although, thankfully, nothing has happened since. Housing development in varying forms have been proposed, built and withdrawn. On the waterfront, in recent years the flotilla of marina development proposals have receded, for now. The completed west bank flood defences have enabled a welcome increase in birdlife at the nature reserve, which is to open a new landmark visitor centre in 2021. The Environment Agency is now pressing on with substantial investment in flood defences, this time on the east bank of the Rother, and work is due to commence very soon. When the defence works are complete, this will unlock further development opportunities to the east, for example at the Rye Creative Centre

The town centre changed a lot in this period with investment in modern apartments, the Kino and other sensitive restoration works by the town’s vibrant business community, all described in the Planning section below. The period also saw the beginnings of the long-awaited regeneration of Rock Channel. Less welcome has been the damage to the town’s vitality caused by the terrible fire at The George Hotel and the never-ending uncertainty over the Landgate’s future.

### **Planning and Development**

After successfully securing its listing, in 2011 there was further good news for the Society when permission was refused to redevelop the Further Education Centre on Lion Street as housing. This paved the way for the Fletcher Group CIC, with St Mary’s Church, to secure a community use for the site. The Lion Street development was consented, following input from the Society, thus paving the way for opening of the Kino and St Mary’s Centre in 2015.

The redevelopment of the Central Garage site on Cinque Ports St was consented for a development of 12 apartments to a design that continues to divide opinion.

In 2011, Sainsbury’s supermarket application was submitted for the Lower School site. Comments from the Society had resulted in significant changes although not enough to remove our objection. Tesco has also developed competing proposals for the same site and, by acquiring the Queen Adelaide, held control of access to the site. Whilst both schemes were consented, by 2017 the rapidly changing retail conditions had resulted in both Sainsbury and Tesco withdrawing their plans. Putting aside a later and welcome extension to Jempson’s, this saw an end to Rye’s supermarket saga.

The story at the Lower School site, however, continued as housing proposals replaced retail. The Society has pushed for changes to the proposals which have mitigated some of the ‘overdevelopment’ concerns, however, the loss of valuable green space and the lack of affordable housing driven by the cost of mitigating flood risk means that the Society remained unsupportive when RDC consented the scheme in 2020.

In 2013, plans for the Studio School on the Rye College campus were submitted, whilst the Society welcomed the school proposals, concerns were raised about some design aspects although the building was consented.

In 2015 the Society objected to the first of a number of applications for the redevelopment of the Grist Mill on Winchelsea Road. This was refused, although the Society supported later scaled down applications by Martello Developments Ltd, who have become a significant player in Rye and own a number of development sites.

A number of housing development proposals emerged through this period including for Rock Channel (in place of Tesco) and the Tilling Green school site. Both were withdrawn. New housing did go ahead on Rock Channel at Bridge Point. This development by Martello Development Ltd was seen as a prelude to the long-awaited regeneration of the area which, by 2020, includes consents for a major arts venue and housing, again at Bridge Point, and a mixed development, including a restaurant, further along Rock Channel at Sandrock Marine. The Society broadly supported the Bridge Point scheme owing to its wider regeneration benefits but remains concerned about the cumulative impact of these developments and how they will be integrated with the town - in particular for access, parking and traffic impact. The Society wants to ensure that the riverside remains a vibrant, architecturally diverse and accessible part of Rye. This should be done whilst maintaining the ‘strategic gap’ in development between the wider Marsh and Rye Harbour and its relationship with the town and Citadel.

Other regeneration applications included the warehouse, or old Granary nightclub, on Ferry Road which received consent for conversion into apartments with the Society’s support following amendments to incorporate our comments. A keen-eyed Committee member, on visiting the construction site, spotted original ironwork that had not appeared in the planning drawings. Following urgent intervention with the planning authority and developer, we are seeking to ensure that these features are retained.

Despite its previous description, by the Planning Inspectorate as a “last resort”, the development of housing on Udimore Road did go ahead. Thankfully Valley Park, as it is named, was sensitively designed and its setting blends into the landscape and doesn’t harm the AONB as had been feared. The scheme was also able to deliver affordable housing, something none of the other development proposals have, so far, delivered. Of greater potential harm to the AONB was a proposal for a BP petrol station and convenience store at a very prominent, and visible, spot next door to Valley Park on Udimore Road. This was strongly objected to by the Society and others and was successfully fended off by 2019 following a refusal and subsequent appeal.

Rye Tennis Club’s proposal for a large indoor court on Military Road was another contentious development which faced widespread community hostility owing to its bulky design and high impact at a sensitive location on an entry point into the town. Unfortunately, this was approved by Rother in 2020 although, so far, we have been spared its implementation.



*Rye's setting in the AONB: Valley Park nestles below the Udimore Road ridge a scene which, thankfully, will not 'crowned' be with a shining BP service station.*

Along Rye Harbour Road a number of consents have been granted for significant new commercial space. The Long Rake Spar aggregates plant seeks to expand its operations as too does a number of firms along the length of the road. Whilst employment opportunities are to be welcomed, the Society has raised concerns about the impact on traffic and, in the case of the aggregate plant, on the negative environmental impact on the wider community. Another significant application in this area was the visitor centre at the Rye Harbour Nature Reserve. The Society welcomed the Discovery Centre as a much-needed facility as the Reserve grows in popularity and status. The scale and design of the centre was a contentious matter and caused keen debate at the time.

### **Heritage and town amenity**

The Society had long worked in league with Rother's planning enforcement team when intervening to ensure that property owners and developers were diligent in their custodianship of the town's listed buildings and conservation area. We were dismayed when Rother's team was halved. This placed greater emphasis on maintaining a good relationship with the one remaining enforcement officer which, happily, seems to have been maintained. Following the restoration of the Cistern on Wish Ward in 2014, the town pump in Church Square was restored in 2018 by the Society in a joint initiative with Rye Town Council. Also, that year, as part of the welcome restoration of the premises, the Society assisted the owners of the Ship Inn in the recreation of the historic pub sign incorporating the original schooner, the 'Madeira Pet'.

Other properties which saw welcome restoration following extended periods of decay were the Monastery on Conduit Hill and the nearby Waterworks, both of which received awards from the Society. Other prominent or historical buildings remain a concern, however, for instance the Boys Club on Mermaid Street and some of the former bank premises on the High Street are places the Society would welcome a viable, and well maintained, future.

Concerns for the future of Landgate have featured throughout the history of the Society, and look set to continue. In 2015, Rother had commissioned a report on its future with recommendations. It was 2019 before remedial maintenance works took place following community pressure from the Society, Town Council and a group set up as the ‘Friends of the Landgate’. This repeated past patterns of last minute, minimal interventions. A Landgate working group was established, however, lack of action since then means this treasured building awaits a proper plan for its on-going management.

Following an enquiry to the highways department at East Sussex, the Society was informed that applying a 20mph speed limit zone in the town centre would have a “cost running to seven figures”. As parking in the town became increasingly lawless, the introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement became the lesser of two evils. The scheme was approved in 2017 and finally commissioned in 2020. This brought about a welcome reduction in illegal parking in the Citadel, however, the scheme will require further refining and the Society looks forward to the thorough review of parking and transport matters as part of a local Transport Strategy that has been promised for 2021.

Shop signs continued to vex the Society, including the loss of a number of historic shop signs and the installation of signs that were anything but. Some traders have approached the Society for advice, and we were particularly welcoming of the sensitive restoration at Ashbee’s on the High Street.

In 2012, following years of campaigning, the Society took matters into its own hands and issued a specification for the laying and maintenance of cobbles. The specification was duly adopted by East Sussex as the highways authority who, in turn, promised to promote this with the utilities and any other applicant’s seeking to dig up the Citadel’s streets. Alas, poor work and the need for careful monitoring remains. The Society was also engaged in a debate over the towns ‘hidden drains’ the metal gullies that transport water from property downpipes to the roadside gutter. There was confusion over who was responsible for their maintenance, in particular where damage was caused by third parties such as pavement parking. The position was ‘clarified’ at least as far as it could be (responsibility is still not clear) but with some guidance issued by the Society in 2016.



*Just think...this could have been apartments – a vibrant hub on Lion St is what happens when the community works together*



*Refreshing and creative -  
Tower Street buildings  
sensitively restored by  
local businesses*

## **6. To sum up....**

Through these decades of change for Rye, a constant has been the Conservation Society and, at its core, its Executive and its Planning Committees. This passionate group of people give their time, expertise and enthusiasm in order to serve the Society's objectives, namely to safeguard and enhance Rye and its surroundings; to provide a forum for discussion of issues; and, to provide information and advice relevant to the local area.

Some Committee Members have given decades of service to the Society as well as their invaluable professional advice on sometimes complex and contentious issues. Inevitably, with the passing of time, the group changes but it is hoped the experiences and lessons are passed on. For instance, since the first Planning Committee, over 5,000 planning applications have been reviewed during which, in assessing proposals, the Committee has to take a careful line in balancing the issues, which are sometimes contradictory, as well as the personal interpretation of the design by members and officers. Whilst the Society's role is advisory and not statutory, it is hoped that by providing a strong and knowledgeable local voice, Rye is a better place than it would have been otherwise. For every intractable issue and bad planning decision, there are breakthroughs and wins and always the hope that our influence will come through.

This review of our history concludes in this strangest of years which has seen Rye swing between lockdown stillness and 'staycation' vibrancy, and it heralds an uncertain future for the town and its vital visitor economy. As ever, on-going change is assured, but the pace of change looks like it will increase substantially. Also on the horizon are the proposed changes to local government and the dismantling of long-standing local land use planning controls, potentially the biggest change in planning since the original Town and Country Planning Act in 1947. An excellent summary of these changes, and their implications for Rye was provided by Julian Lockett, the Chair of the Planning Committee, in the Society's most recent Annual Report.

There is a risk that the hard work invested in local and neighbourhood plans will be eroded and we are already seeing the effects of this as the scramble to meet nationally imposed housing targets resulting in bad planning decisions. If the planning system and local government management continue to be streamlined as planned, a local organisation that understands, and is passionate about, the town will be more vital than ever.

## **9 Roads and Transport** *Allan Thomson, Committee Member for Roads and Transport*

We recently wrote to our local Councillor and Leader of East Sussex Council concerning the review of parking in Rye.

“The Rye Conservation Society has some general views and recommendations on parking and on the current condition of the streets of Rye that we would like to raise with you. The timing seems appropriate as East Sussex Highways commence the first stage of a parking review of Rother’s controlled parking restrictions.

The Society welcomed the introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) in Rye and we believe the scheme has had a positive impact on the town, reducing irregular parking such as pavement parking and therefore improving the environment and safety. The benefits have been particularly apparent during this last busy summer visitor season. At the time of introduction, it was flagged up that there could be ‘overspill’ of parking into areas not included in the control area, for example along Military Road, The Grove and Ferry Road.

The Society would support the extension of CPE and/or resident permit parking into these areas if this would be of benefit. Around the time of introducing CPE in Rye, the Society recommended to your officers some improvements that would tidy-up CPE signing around the conservation area. This included removing some signs and adjusting the height of others. Aside from one particularly poorly located sign on West Street disappearing in the past few weeks, these recommendations have not yet been acted upon so we’d like to see improvements to the current CPE signing considered in the review.

We would also like to take this opportunity to raise the related issue of the poor and deteriorating state of the road surfaces and pavements in and around Rye town centre.

Potholes are becoming more numerous and deeper, whilst uneven slabs and loose kerbstones are making the pavements difficult to negotiate. As vehicles and pedestrians are often required to share space in the town centre, conditions for pedestrians in particular are becoming more difficult, even hazardous. With the, hopefully, imminent removal of the scaffolding at the George Hotel on the High Street it would be reassuring to hear from you about East Sussex’s plans for street repairs and improvements in the town centre.

As part of any plans to amend parking or to improve the streets, the High Street in particular would benefit from a more imaginative review of how space is allocated to better balance the needs of pedestrians, essential vehicle access, loading and parking. At present the balance seems very much weighed against a comfortable and safe environment for pedestrians. As a measure that could contribute to relieving traffic pressure on the town centre, we welcomed Rother Council’s reduction in restrictions and costs for parking at Gibbet Marsh.

We would welcome complementary measures by East Sussex Highways to improve road signage to direct drivers to Gibbet Marsh. A good start would be to direct fewer vehicles towards the limited parking in the historic core of the town which is currently signposted as “town centre (via narrow arch)” along the A268 through the town. In fact, there are four signs on Tower Street directing drivers to the High Street when we believe there should be signage directing them to local car parks.”

## 10 WEB SITE ([www.ryeconservationsociety.org](http://www.ryeconservationsociety.org))

The Web Site has been updated somewhat haphazardly over the past year, but now includes all our monthly planning reports for the past eighteen months and a regular blog covering local issues. A number of people have joined the Society having found the link to the membership form and the total number of visitors is around fifty per month. Our Newsletters are posted to the site together with reports of social events and notices of future events including the AGM.

On a similar note we lag behind other organisations in not holding e.mail addresses for many of our members which makes communication more difficult despite the staunch help of our envelope distributors, so we will hope with members agreement to update the records to include e.mail addresses and use them to distribute notices of meetings and Newsletters. As mentioned earlier, the Committee have been using the Zoom facility to enable meetings to be held, but we will hope to be able to meet in person again soon

### Finally

As this Report goes to Adams to print we have a small debate around the last remaining red telephone boxes, the one at the lower end of Mermaid Street looks iconic but it only handles three calls a month. So the proposal is for Rye Town Council to adopt the phone box for another use, perhaps to hold a defibrillator or a mini library. I have suggested that we run a competition to come up with the best use of something whose original purpose seems to have passed but which should remain as a nostalgic reminder, I am sure members have made many interesting and or urgent calls from here!



I hope that you have found this Report an interesting reminder of some of our activities during the past eighteen months since our last AGM. We can only hope that there will be better news in the months to come and that we will be able to meet up and work to improve our wonderful town of Rye. In the mean time I wish all our members good health for Christmas and the coming Year.

*David Bookless*

## NOTES

### **The Purposes of the Society**

The Society was founded in 1972 and under the Constitution, which it later adopted, is concerned with the area comprising Rye Town, Playden, Rye Foreign, East Guldeford and the Rye Harbour area of the Civil Parishes of Icklesham and Camber.

The principal objects of the Society within that area are: to stimulate public interest in the area, to promote high standards of planning and architecture, and to secure the preservation, development and improvement of features of historic or public interest.

In the course of promoting its work the Society has secured registration as a charity. It is a member of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the Campaign to Protect Rural England.