

# **RYDE TOWN COUNCIL**

## **Report of a Business Planning Workshop held on Tuesday 3 March 2020**

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March 2020

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held on  
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## Section 1 Introduction

1.1 Ryde Town Council commissioned the author to facilitate a Business Planning Workshop with the aim of creating a strategic platform from which to develop a Business Plan for the current term of the Council and beyond. The Business Planning Workshop took place on Tuesday 3 March 2020 at the Aspire Community Centre and was attended by most of the councillors and staff.

1.2 The programme for the day included the following key elements:

- (i) The day commenced by the facilitator setting the scene by outlining the issues, challenges and opportunities currently facing the local council sector in the wider context of a reducing public sector.
- (ii) This was followed by delegates considering the Council's future role and activities. It included participants, divided into three groups with a mix of councillors and staff, being requested to consider the following questions:
  - What are essential services, activities and assets for the Town Council to continue to deliver or manage in the future, and why?
  - What other services and assets could or should the Town Council be seeking to take more control over?
  - How should the above services and assets (existing and future) be delivered or managed (e.g. directly, contracted out, in partnership with other organisations)?
  - What are the main organisations with which the Council is or could be working and how can this partnership working best be managed?

When considering the above questions delegates were requested to consider the implications of the 2018 'Vision for Ryde' and the recently approved 'Ryde Place Plan'.

- (iii) The next session was for the delegates to consider of 'Way Forward' for the Town Council by evaluating the key messages arising from the questions posed in (ii) above. Participants worked as one group for this exercise and looked at the possible priorities of the Town Council over the short, medium and longer terms. These deliberations, once considered by Council, will form the basis of a Business Plan going forward.
- (iv) This was followed by delegates considering three key areas as part of the delivery the previously identified priorities. Again,

participants were divided into three groups. In order to achieve a different mix, the membership of the groups was changed from the earlier group session. Participants were asked to consider the following three elements linked to the development of a Business Plan, namely:

- Funding of Activities
- Staffing implications
- Organisational and decision making structure.

- (v) Finally, those present considered the next steps required in order to take the whole process of developing and implementing a Business Plan forward.

1.3 Those in attendance were as follows:

**Councillors**

Michael Lilley, Mayor

Adrian Axford, Deputy Mayor

Charles Chapman

Diana Conyers

Nancy Farrell

Phil Jordan

Karen Lucioni

Sue Lyons

Malcolm Ross

Lou Temel

**Staff**

Gareth Hughes, Responsible Financial Officer and Interim Clerk

Lisa Dyer, Deputy Clerk

Maiya Dixon

Liz Dutton

Elizabeth Gough

Shona Parnell

Liam Pearce

Phil Plant

Chris Turvey

## Section 2 Summary of the Business Planning Workshop

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the findings arising from the Workshop exercise and summarise the key aims, objectives, issues and some initial priorities emanating from the discussions. The process was very positive and all those present actively participated. The next stage is for the Council to consider the outcomes of the Workshop as a strategic platform on which to establish priorities, develop a new Business Plan and timeline for the duration of the current Council and beyond. This will also include the first year of the next Council in May 2021 as their budget will be set by the current administration. It will also be necessary to consider the resources needed to deliver the new Business Plan, both in terms of finance and staffing resources. Consideration of the current 'Core Services' of the Council will also be necessary. The 'Core Services' were not considered in detail as part of the Workshop process but they are critical to the continued efficient management and operation of the Town Council. A more detailed consideration of 'Core Services' is outlined in Section 6 (paragraph 6.4, page 18). All of the foregoing considerations will need to be completed formally ahead of the budget setting process through the coming autumn. This will form the basis of the strategic financial considerations in order to deliver the Business Plan.
- 2.2 The participants had a very clear vision for both the future of the town, the community and for Ryde Town Council. During the process there was enthusiasm for the future development of these areas and it was agreed that the proposed Business Plan must be deliverable and properly resourced.
- 2.3 When finalising the Business Plan the Council also needs to consider 'risk'. Clearly the Council has a fiduciary duty to ensure that public money and resources cannot be put to unnecessary risk. However, particularly in the current public sector environment, there will be a need, at times, to consider 'managed risk', particularly when treading new ground. When doing so it is essential that all known and anticipated issues are considered at the time and clearly documented.
- 2.4 For the purpose of developing an initial timeline for the process, it is recommended that the findings to date are divided into short, medium and longer term objectives. This report will act as a guide by summarising the opinions expressed at the Business Planning Workshop but it is important that the proposed Business Plan is flexible, regularly reviewed and can respond quickly to changes in circumstances or opportunities that may arise.
- 2.5 Delegates were very clear that they wanted to achieve some 'quick wins' in order to demonstrate their commitment to the community. Wherever appropriate these have been clearly identified in the following sections.

### Section 3 The Council's Future Role and Activities

3.1 To commence the visioning process the facilitator took the participants through a series of questions in order to consider the future role of the Town Council in order to provide the basis of considerations for the Business Plan. It will be for the Town Council to consider which of the issues raised should be included in the new Business Plan and what the priority should be. The four questions posed regarding the future role of the Town Council were as follows:

- What are essential services, activities and assets for the Town Council to continue to deliver or manage in the future, and why?
- What other services and assets could or should the Town Council be seeking to take more control over?
- How should the above services and assets (existing and future) be delivered or managed (e.g. directly, contracted out, in partnership with other organisations)?
- What are the main organisations with which the Council is or could be working and how can this partnership working best be managed?

When considering the above questions delegates were requested to consider the implications of the 2018 'Vision for Ryde' and the recently approved 'Ryde Place Plan'. The results put forward, in no particular priority order are outlined below.

3.2 **Question 1 - What are essential services, activities and assets for the Town Council to continue to deliver or manage in the future, and why?**

Toilets

Allotments

Skate Park/Activity Place

Town Council Office with public access. Human interaction in a more visible location

Network Ryde Youth Service

Environmental Officers

Bin collections

Beach Cleaning

Grounds Maintenance

Life-Guard service

Christmas Decorations (Festive lighting)

Grant funding and Aspire Community Centre

Community Connector  
Carnival, Pride, Classic Car and Mardi Gras events  
Beach Soccer, Waterside and Paddling Pool  
Swanmore Meadows  
Care of public spaces  
Pig Leg Lane Nature Reserve.

**3.3 Question 2 - What other services and assets could or should the Town Council be seeking to take more control over?**

Canoe/Boating Lake  
Splash Park  
Beach Huts  
Western Gardens  
Working with Seaview Parish Council to address land and property issues along the border  
Local Markets (when High Street is pedestrianised)  
Tourist Information Centre  
Income from Poster sites  
Ryde Harbour  
Appley Tower  
Beach Concessions  
Appley Park  
Ryde Theatre  
Dotto Train (Eco friendly)  
'Civics'  
The Pier  
Housing  
Tourist offer  
Business Start-ups  
Commercial enterprise  
Event Management  
Esplanade and the Beaches  
Eastern Gardens

Community Orchard

Deck Chairs

Electric Bikes – hire and charging

Build allotment provision into housing development.

**3.4 Question 3 - How should the above services and assets (existing and future) be delivered or managed (e.g. directly, contracted out, in partnership with other organisations)?**

Toilet cleaning – bring ‘in-house’ (initial outlay required for equipment)

Combine all sub-contractors into one company

Collaborative working with Wightlink, Hover Travel and Southern Vectis

More direct management

Seek expert advice

Third party CIC's

Trust arrangements

More partnership working – Isle of Wight Council, neighbouring Parish Councils and the community

Through funding from bodies such as Historic England.

**3.5 Question 4 – What are the main organisations with which the Council is or could be working and how can this partnership working best be managed?**

Isle of Wight Council – be more assertive

Aspire Community Centre

Regeneration Working Group

Councillors to be more involved in Community Groups

Collaborative working with Wightlink, Hover Travel, Network Rail and Southern Vectis

Community organisations

Ryde Business Association

Ryde Historic Society

Historic England

English Heritage

Ryde Harbour users

Carnival community

Arts organisations

Chamber of Commerce

Isle of Wight Clinical Commissioning Group

Neighbouring Parish Councils

Ryde Town Council to facilitate groups to achieve projects

Co-ordinate support between fund beneficiaries

Set up Ryde Tourism Committee.

- 3.6 It can be seen from the foregoing that there was plenty of enthusiasm and ideas for the future role of Ryde Town Council and Ryde itself. It is clear that there are some strong views on some of the subjects and that warrants further discussion before drafting the Business Plan and associated timeline. Therefore, it is suggested that when the Council considers this report it will be worth revisiting the lists above to consider the role of the Town Council and allocate priorities accordingly. The creation of a Working Group to summarise a way forward for the Council to consider would be a practical way of approaching this. Such a role should also look at the resource issues likely to be required to deliver the plan. However, those present had an initial attempt to consider outline priorities is outlined in Section 4 (below).

## Section 4 The Way Forward

4.1 The morning session considered the four previous questions and after a brief lunch, delegates worked as one group to evaluate the headline messages from the morning and consider some outline priorities for the Town Council in the short, medium and longer term. The purpose of this exercise was to provide the basis for Council to consider a Business Plan going forward and the following timeline was agreed:

- Short-term                    2020/21 (The budget is already set)
- Medium-term                April 2021 to March 2023
- Long-term                    April 2023 to March 2025 and beyond

4.2 Delegates were very clear on the initial short-term priorities that should formally be considered by Ryde Town Council, as follows:

- i) An early 'summit' meeting with the Isle of Wight Council to discuss devolution of services and assets and to agree areas of joint working that would be mutually beneficial. Issues to include Ryde Harbour, the Beach and Esplanade, the implementation of the Ryde Place Plan and items listed in Section 3 (above). It should be noted that the Isle of Wight Council has also adopted the Ryde Place Plan. This bodes well for devolution and partnership good negotiations.
- ii) The 'Town Hall/Theatre' project should be treated as an early priority and the involvement of Historic England was seen as essential.
- iii) Take an early proactive role with the Ryde Regeneration Group and assess priorities accordingly.
- iv) Undertake an early review of services, contracts and assets, including beach cleaning.
- v) Encourage resident involvement in projects and initiatives from the outset.
- vi) Taking over Appley Tower and Park.
- vii) Develop the Civic role further (Robes and Civic Memorabilia).
- viii) Consider resurrecting 'Ticket to Ryde' – Destination not Gateway.

4.3 With a visioning exercise such as this, enthusiasm can often take over and there is a temptation to 'front load' priorities into the short-term. Many of the above short-term suggestions can be commenced during 2020/21 and this will show a real commitment by the Town Council and also to build momentum which is vitally important. Inevitable some will be phased over the medium

and possibly longer terms. The initial 'medium term' priorities identified by delegates were as follows:

- i) Housing allocation for Ryde of 2,000 units:
  - ensure adequate infrastructure is provided
  - ensure developers are aware of Ryde Town Council's requirements and views.
  - review empty properties
  - consider the role of housing provider for Ryde Town Council.
- ii) Feasibility of mainland partnerships with University of Portsmouth and the principal councils.
- ii) Transfer of Appley Tower.
- iii) Take over the Beaches and Esplanade.
- iv) Develop a Funding Plan, to include:
  - Business Development Officer
  - New income generation streams
  - 'Commercialisation'
  - Showcase event – Social Investment Funders
  - Joint initiatives with neighbouring Parish Councils and the Isle of Wight Council
  - Involve Ryde School
  - Involve local residents as appropriate.
- v) Review contracts – grounds maintenance, contractors and cluster working.

4.4 Although it was accepted that some elements of the previously mentioned projects will end up as 'Long term', there were two projects specifically nominated for the long-term, namely:

- Ryde Town Council sponsored housing schemes
- Assemble a 'Property Portfolio'

4.5 Once the Business Plan is approved it is essential that Project Delivery Plan and Timeline is developed in order to add a discipline for implementation. This can be developed in order to deliver the priorities through the lifetime of the Business Plan identifying the various projects and their key phases.

- 4.6 At the end of this session it was agreed there needed to be a Town Hall/Theatre Project Team established and a very early meeting held to consider the project in more detail to establish an action Plan with an associated timeline. One suggestion was to consider the key elements of the possible project and establish a Working Party to consider the detailed elements, reporting to Council as appropriate. Some of the points agreed were as follows:

Undertake a Feasibility Study.

An early meeting with Historic England.

Develop a Project Plan.

Other comments included – create a focal point for the town, community resource centre, include facilities and opportunities for young people (music, dance etc.), consider the War Memorial and save the organ.

## **Section 5 How Do We Get There?**

5.1 The participants were divided into three different groups for this session. They were asked to consider the following issues in order to deliver the previously identified initial priorities as component parts of a future Business Plan. Each group was also given a diagram, prepared by the staff, showing a possible organisational structure. In line with the previous deliberations there was a great deal of common thought among the groups but with some different ideas on approach. The summary of which is outlined in the next three sections.

### **5.2 Funding of Activities**

- i) Harbour Project – Public Works Loan Board for the capital investment required followed by self-funding revenue to cover operational costs.
- ii) Income generation from new projects such as electric bikes and charging points.
- iii) Fund raising from community initiatives such as selling commemorative plaques.
- iv) Grants, bidding for funding streams, Lottery etc. (see staffing implications in 5.3 ii) below).
- v) High Street Pedestrianisation – use HSHAZ funds.
- vi) Local business investment and sponsorship.
- vii) Precept – continues to fund some projects.
- viii) Collaborative working is the way forward and considering match funding where appropriate.

### **5.3 Staffing Implications**

- i) It was agreed that the permanent staff structure would need to be finalised once the new Town Clerk was appointed and their skills and expertise considered.
- ii) It was stated that seeking external funding is a specialist skill and can be time consuming. Some of the key staff do not have the capacity in terms of time or skills, therefore some training is required. One option put

forward was to appoint a 'bid writer', either directly employed or on a commission contract. Another was to seek from the Coastal Community Fund but that assistance would be needed.

- iii) Project Management - There is a need for some of the current staff to be trained in procurement, specification writing together with project management. The latter was particularly with regard to the implementation of the Business Plan. Dependent on the type and range of projects included in the final Business Plan it may be prudent to 'buy-in' expertise or project managers for one-off projects.
- iv) The need to appoint a 'Business Development' member of staff was seen as a high priority, especially with the range of projects and initiatives previously identified. Again, the type of person and range of skills will be dependent on the appointment of the new Clerk and their experience and capabilities.
- v) Development of the staff team was seen as critical and that current practice can be built upon. Once a Business Plan is approved the objectives should then cascade down through the Town Clerk to the staff team. This can be achieved by utilising a Personal and Development Plan system, details of which can be provided on request.
- vi) The need for Media staff and/or training was put forward by one group.
- vii) Another group said that there was a need for additional staff and this would increase the Town Council's overhead costs but could be off-set through increased income generation.
- viii) Staff capacity was a concern but it did not diminish enthusiasm.
- ix) One group suggested that there was a need to consider appointing a Project Officer.

#### 5.4 Organisational and Decision-Making Structure

- i) Consider which elements of the Bristol City Council structure and approach are appropriate for Ryde Town Council going forward.

- ii) Establish a Community Interest Company as the trading arm of the Town Council.
- iii) Establish a Chairs Group where the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and the Chairs of the Committees meet informally with the Town Clerk, once per Council cycle of meetings, to review the previous cycle and discuss the business to be transacted in the future and any related operational issues.
- iv) The use of 'SMARTER' working techniques was mentioned by one group. For those who are unaware of this acronym it comprises of the following approach to objective setting:
  - ▶ **Specific** – goals well defined with clear outcomes sought.
  - ▶ **Measurable** – enable evaluation on whether a goal is achieved or not
  - ▶ **Attainable** – ensure the goals are realistic given the resources, knowledge and time available.
  - ▶ **Relevant** – do they make a material impact on the overall objectives?
  - ▶ **Time-Based** – set a specific timeframe within which goals must be completed.
- v) The Council needs to be ready for opportunities when they arise.
- vi) It was agreed that the Town Council needs a Scheme of Delegation. This will need to document the key delegation to committees and key officers to enable efficient use of resources, ensure decisions are made at the appropriate level in the organisation and budgets delegated accordingly.

**Note** – the author has already sent the Deputy Clerk a draft Scheme of Delegation that can be customised to meet the requirements of Ryde Town Council.
- vii) Reform or restructure the Ryde Regeneration Working Group.

- viii) Councillors Skills Matrix should be assessed and their skills and expertise better utilised.

**Note** – the author has already sent the Deputy Clerk a draft that could Councillors Skills Questionnaire that can be customised to meet the requirements of Ryde Town Council.

- ix) Reduce the frequency of Council meetings.
- x) One group suggested that the current Committee structure was time consuming and not re-active.
- xi) Other changes put forward included Ward member meetings, an improved dialogue with residents, discussions with groups who receive grants from the Town Council, a Youth Council, open forums for discussion and to widen the dialogue, not just with local groups.
- xii) A final comment in this section from one of the groups was 'Trust – Acting in Good Faith'.

5.5 The need to establish a Ryde Town Hall/Theatre Project Team or similar was again reiterated as an essential early priority.

## Section 6 The Next Steps

6.1 Arising from the process and considerations outlined in the previous chapters it is now possible for the Town Council to identify their objectives and priorities and to develop a Business Plan with a clear timeline. This will be on the basis of short, medium and longer term objectives. It should be noted at this stage one of the aims discussed was to 'front load' the plan with a number of short-term objectives (quick wins). However, it should be noted that the process tends to be refined as it progresses through the more detailed consideration stages, particularly with regard to financial and staff resources. It is vital that a future Business Plan is flexible in order to reflect and respond to changes throughout the duration of the plan. In addition, it needs to be regularly monitored and amended if necessary. As previously stated, the following timescale for the Business Plan priorities is suggested:

Short term	2020/21 (Budget for 2020/21 already agreed)
Medium term	1 April 2021 to 31 March 2023
Long term	1 April 2023 and beyond.

6.2 A number of the items considered at the Workshop will require further investigation, survey work or feasibility studies due to the nature of the projects, in particular the proposed Town Hall/Theatre project. Although this could limit some 'quick wins', both in terms of resources and finance, good progress can still be made in the short-term. In order to assist this process, it is suggested that a Project Delivery Plan process is undertaken at the outset. One fairly simple technique that could be considered is the use of a Gantt Chart, as mentioned at the Workshop. This will ensure that the workload can be properly planned and managed and to avoid peaks and pressures on the staff team, particularly with a wide range of initial tasks.

6.3 Although the Town Council has yet to formally consider this report and decide on its priorities for the Business Plan it is clear there is a strong appetite for both improving Ryde together with the services and facilities delivered by the Town Council. To achieve this the role of Ryde Town Council will need to be enhanced and developed. The priorities and content of the Business Plan now need to be agreed and a timeline given to both implementation and review. It is only at that stage, and with the appointment of a new Town Clerk, can the level of resources required be assessed.

6.4 In undertaking this task the Council must not lose sight of the 'Core Business' of the Council and what this entails in terms of resource (finance and staff). There is a significant amount of day to day and cyclical work involved in the efficient operation of the Town Council. This was briefly touched upon at the Workshop. For example, the amount of staff time involved in researching, writing reports, preparing agendas, attending and minuting meetings, preparing and actioning the minutes for committee and Council meetings. In addition, there is the need to produce newsletters, maintain a website and appropriate social media presence, organise the Annual Town Assembly and provide a range of local initiatives and services as part of the 'Core Business'. As a result,

there is limited 'headroom', as things currently stand, for new initiatives and projects. However, as part of the resourcing of the Business Plan it is a good idea to review whether everything currently being undertaken is essential or whether the decision-making process can be rationalised.

- 6.5 The Council is clearly ambitious and is well regarded both within the community and the local council sector. It is a very busy and proactive Council and the day to day workloads are already high. The staff team is small but committed and are keen to see the role of the Town Council develop.
- 6.6 Once a draft Business Plan is agreed it is recommended that a resource review is undertaken at that time to ascertain how and by whom the plan can be implemented. As part of this process the Town Council will need to reaffirm or rationalise its core service and decision-making process. Any major projects will require a range of feasibility and/or survey work that is required in the short-term. It is also likely to involve a more complex level of project management, as previously stated. This will require further staff training or may need to be resourced with specialist contractors/consultants.
- 6.7 The Town Council has a good track record for training and development of its staff and this will need to continue and be refined to meet the challenges ahead. The Council also has a duty of care for its staff and accordingly risks must be managed along the journey into the future.
- 6.8 As stated at the Workshop, business planning can be over complicated and confusing, therefore it is recommended the Town Council uses a very simple process to develop, monitor and amend its Business Plan.

## Section 7 Concluding Remarks

- 7.1 The decision of the Town Council to hold a Business Planning Workshop shows a strategic ambition to develop a Business Plan and initiate a range of projects and service improvements for Ryde. They believe the role of the Town Council in the future is central to achieving a wide range of improvements. The Workshop itself was a very positive process with many good ideas and options coming forward. The enthusiasm of those present and the way councillors and staff worked so positively together bodes very well for the future. It is important that Ryde Town Council now builds on this good start and creates a firm foundation on which to move forward.
- 7.2 It is clear the Town Hall/Theatre project is an early priority as is the Harbour. A new Town Clerk is shortly to be appointed and, once the new person is in place, a review of the staff structure required to deliver the Business Plan can be undertaken. The need to rationalise the decision making process was generally agreed as well as the introduction of a Scheme of Delegation and a 'Chairs Group'. Such initiatives will improve business management and hopefully provide staff savings with less servicing of meetings that can be reinvested into service delivery. The need for a 'trading arm' of the Town Council was identified as well as a business development officer and the establishment of a Community Interest Company. A range of views were put forward regarding financing and income generation to resource the Business Plan. It should be noted that now is a good time to borrow money as interest rates recently hit an all-time low. Borrowing for major capital projects means that future generations will also receive the benefit and should therefore contribute to the cost.
- 7.3 The Place Plan for Ryde is a good document and shows the potential for the town. It identifies a very clear and positive role for Ryde Town Council going forward in partnership with a number of organisations. The role will include service delivery, direct provision, influencing, positive partnerships and joint working, steering projects and initiatives and the facilitation of others working together. A fully integrated transport system and the need to connect the Esplanade with upper Ryde is a good example of the latter. Such a project would provide a good opportunity for the Town Council to work in partnership with other local transport providers to achieve this by taking a local leadership and facilitation role.
- 7.4 In today's economic climate it is often difficult for one organisation to achieve major capital projects or significant developments in service delivery. Therefore, collaborative and partnership working is becoming increasingly more common. To this end the fact that both Ryde Town Council and the Isle of Wight Council have both formally adopted The Place Plan for Ryde bodes well for future joint working. The Town Council clearly has a vision for the future for realising the potential of Ryde and its community. Now is the time for brave decisions and strong and positive local leadership. Provided it is properly resourced and managed with councillors, partners and staff working positively working together, a great deal can be achieved. The Town Council also needs to involve the community in the delivery of the Business Plan and therefore

good communications is essential. Some of the better Business Plans include a Communications Strategy at the outset and not leaving it to the last consideration or an afterthought. The use of a branding strap line is a good way of creating an identity for all that the Business Plan is seeking to achieve. A strap line gives the process and projects a corporate identity that is recognised by residents, visitors and partners. One of the delegates at the Workshop mentioned 'Ryde First' which is a good suggestion.

- 7.5 As previously stated a Project Delivery Plan will be needed in order to implement the agreed Business Plan and a Working Group should be established to achieve this. The role of such a group would be to develop the key elements of the Business Plan looking at the resource options required and solutions as to how projects can be achieved. At times this will need to include innovative solutions, including a more 'commercial' approach to project and service delivery, new partnerships created, new income streams and sources of funding identified. In Section 2 (paragraph 2.3) the need for the Town Council to consider 'managed risk' was identified. It is for considerations such as these that it was mentioned. The terms of reference for such a group would need to be agreed by Council and key objectives set. The Workshop made excellent progress in identifying a way forward and the next stage is key to make the Business Plan a reality.
- 7.6 The Place Plan states "there is a unique opportunity now, in the hands of Ryde Town Council, to set in motion a plan that will celebrate the distinctive characteristics of place while demanding the best of the new, so that quality and authenticity add richness to a life in Ryde". It also described Ryde as the town with all the gifts, the most likely to succeed and identified a wide range of opportunities. The Workshop echoed much of that and showed there is no shortage of enthusiasm, vision, commitment and local leadership. It is important this is incorporated into the Business Plan and for the Town Council to 'make it happen and make a difference'.

**Good Luck Team Ryde - The Future Looks Positive.**