



'We Love Ryde' – Business Engagement Proposal

Background:

Ryde has had an established business association for many decades. The set up for all the previous associations over the last 30 years, has been of a volunteer led committee and businesses signing up to pay a financial contribution to become a member in order to have the rights to attend meetings, network and have voting rights on decision making. Over the years different committees have had various aims for the association but broadly the priorities have remained the same: Empty Shops, Parking, Public Realm being the most common themes.

There is little evidence of successful transition between successive groups. The pattern has been that once one chair/committee disband, a full new group is created who then start up from scratch. This has often included the need to arrange all committee positions, new bank account, new website/social media etc

There is also a history of negativity/fall out between areas of the town, resulting in the past of different associations being set up.

By 2015 there was a business association but little engagement from businesses other than those in the direct committee. Some of the committee at this time were also councillors which at times caused confusion as to where responsibilities lay between the association and the town council.

2016-2023:

In 2016, I (Zoe Thompson) volunteered to take on the role of chair of RBA. Due to there being a lot of issues at the time with the perception of the association I requested that a new committee be formed and the constitution to be updated (aims of RBA from 2016 outlined below).

2: OBJECTS - The aims of the association:

The RBA acts as a central point for Businesses, organisations and individuals based in and around the Ryde district.

The aims of the association are to:

2.1 Encourage collaborative working: Encourage and support the joint working between businesses, organisations, individuals, and local authorities to help promote the growth and prosperity of the Ryde District.

2.2 Promote Ryde: Advertise, and communicate the benefits of the Ryde district to all members of the community. Including residents, local Island communities beyond that of Ryde, and Tourist visitors coming to the island.

2.3 Organise, Develop and carry out Events: RBA will consider a variety of events that will help to encourage visitors to the area, promote community collaboration, and contribute to the events calendar for the island.

2.4 Promote Businesses/Organisations/Voluntary Groups: Assist in the advertising of local businesses/organisations and voluntary groups in the Ryde district, through social media, local advertising and wider reaching marketing campaigns (where funding permits).

2.5 Support local Businesses/Organisations/Voluntary Groups: Offer support and encouragement to all businesses/organisations/voluntary groups within the Ryde district. Offer advice within the remit of the association, and signpost to other professionals where needed.

2.6 Encourage independent small business: RBA will support preserving the town's independent businesses, ensuring that there continues to be a good variety of high street trade, and associated companies working within the Ryde District.

In furtherance to the previous objects RBA may:

2.7 Obtain collect and receive money by way of grants, donations, bequests, legacies or

other lawful method.

2.8 Give consideration and where necessary develop projects to enhance accessibility within the Ryde District.

2.9 Through promotion, and celebration, ensuring value is placed on the history and heritage of town and surrounding areas.

2.10 Give consideration and where necessary develop projects to enhance, protect and preserve the natural environment and ecology within the Ryde District.

2.11 Develop and where appropriate carry out research that will help gain information and opinion to support carrying out the objects in part or in full as set out above.

During my time as RBA chair, my priority was to encourage and enhance collaboration and move away from the model of 'membership', i.e. what is in it for each paid up member, and instead get businesses, organisations and community groups to understand how working together and promoting the town as a whole, is of benefit to everyone.

To achieve this, I implemented the following:

Anyone could attend meetings or request to be on the email database. Often people talked of not knowing what was happening in the town, or felt they didn't get an opportunity to express their views, so making it as easy as possible for people to get information was important.

Newsletters and invites to collaborate on projects/campaigns went out to every business regardless of their previous engagement with the association. When I came into post there was a lot of historical issues with RBA that were inherited. I knew that I would need to put in the work to engage members of the business community and so keeping communication open to everyone, even those who had very negative views towards the association was necessary.

Encourage art and creative organisations and other community groups to be involved. I felt strongly that the success of businesses in Ryde was linked to the other strengths we have in the area. Carnival groups, history and heritage societies, ecology organisation etc are essential to the town and it was necessary for everyone to have an understanding of what the town has to offer and how people can work together.

Ensure strong representation on behalf of businesses in Ryde to other meetings, i.e. RTC, IWC etc. In order for the Ryde business community to feel informed and empowered it was necessary that there was an easy line of communication between them and other decision makers for the town. By directly attending meetings to feed into and back gave a broader range of insight and reinforced that for change to occur people need to make use of the channels available to them to give their ideas and opinions.

2023-2025

After over 6 years of chairing RBA I proposed that a new team take over to allow me time to dedicate to my own businesses. The association was now well established and there were clear priorities to continue with. After some time, a group came forward to take this on. Unfortunately, within 6 months it was clear that they had run into difficulties and over an 18-month period were unsuccessful at managing the association with little to no engagement with the Ryde business community.

2025 – The Future:

Over the past year I have been approached and contacted many times by various businesses and organisation about starting up the RBA again. There is a clear need for an independently run organisation to act with and on behalf of the town's business community. From speaking to people, the needs appear to be the same as they were when I first took on the role in 2016, with more emphasis on better communication between decision making bodies and the community due to the growth and development of Ryde Town Council and the establishment of the Ryde Neighbourhood Board.

PROPOSAL:

AIMS:

Over the next 18 months re-establish an organisation that works with and for the business and wider community of Ryde by:

- Reconnecting with businesses and organisations, building back trust in the process of collaboration.
- Creating clear lines of communication particularly in relation to the ongoing work of the Ryde Neighbourhood Board and Ryde Town Council
- Work towards a more sustainable organisational format which can be self-funded to achieve the aims the town.

ACHIEVE THIS BY:

- Moving away from the old business association model of a 100% volunteer managed group and instead have a part funded lead to ensure commitment and consistency to re-establish the community organisation: **'We Love Ryde'**.
- Create a website/directory which acts as a visitor/community info hub to promote businesses and the town.
- Create a business portal to effectively manager direct communication to businesses and organisations
- Hold 5 in person meetings per year for businesses and organisations to attend to share ideas and discuss priority topics.
- Organisational lead or nominated person to attend any additional meetings and assist in consultation/decision making processes for RNB/RTC/IWC.

FUNDING:

To achieve the above the successfully the following seed funding is being requested (based on an 18-month initial commitment)

£5,000 - website design and IT

£12,480 – Freelance staff including Project lead based on a commitment of 1 day per week over an 18-month period. Any additional work beyond this would be by voluntary arrangement.

£300 – Stationary/materials/printing costs etc

Any specific projects/campaigns/events within this time would be funded directly by businesses or via grants.

TOTAL FUNDING REQUEST: £17,780.

I hope that a financial investment would be seen as good value for the work and the positive outcomes I believe can be achieved within this time frame to set the ground work for a longer-term commitment to supporting, promoting and celebrating the business community in the Ryde area.

I appreciate that there are likely to be questions as to how this may work going forward, and welcome a discussion around how this can benefit the aims of the Ryde Neighbourhood Board.

I look forward to having this opportunity at the next meeting.

Kind Regards

Zoe Thompson

ACHIEVEMENTS WHILST IN POST AS RBA CHAIR 2016-2023.

- Reestablishing RBA with successful engagement including over 120 individual businesses on the mailing list obtaining regular communications
- Overseeing business communications during the pandemic, including directly supporting businesses to obtain grants totalling £34,000.
- Working with the Isle of Wight Council's head of regeneration to input into strategic planning for Ryde.
- Assisting in the development of the Ryde Town Place Plan.
- Presenting and leading a tour of the town to members of Historic England for the Historic Places Panel Review (HE report provided in Sep 2019)
- Initiating original discussions with the landlord of the Packs building and community groups (which in turn became The Department project)
- Being directly involved in both the EOI and final successful bid for the towns Heritage Action Zone
- Project Managing the initial implementation of the HAZ in 2020.
- Sitting on the Ryde Regeneration committee from its initial inception.
- Directly obtaining external grant funding for events and projects including re-establishing Christmas late night shopping and refurbishing the 'co-op' square with mural work.
- Running biannual successful 'shop local' campaigns to directly encourage spend into the town, which have subsequently been rolled out by other island towns.