

Parish Assembly 2017

The following notes summarise the proceedings at the Assembly held on 27 April 2017 at the Memorial Hall, High Street, Battle at 7.30pm.

1. Welcome from Chairman and opening remarks

Cllr Furness welcomed those present and thanked Saxonwood Women's Institute for producing the tea and coffee. He also thanked all the groups and organisations who had organised table displays to promote their activities.

Cllr Furness reported that although the Town is asset rich: the Almonry; recreation grounds and cemetery; it remains cash poor. He highlighted the current political climate with cuts in grants that threaten many services provided by both the County Council and District Council. These have a potential impact on expectation of Parishes to provide some of these amenities. With the constant danger of legislation for capping of parish precept the Council had taken the decision to take action to improve its financial position while it was still able.

2. Written questions submitted prior to meeting

Town Clerk, Carol Harris reported that there had been 5 communications in relation to the **Council's proposal not to consecrate the new cemetery extension**. She confirmed that an informal meeting had taken place with the Dean and 3 Members of the Council to discuss this matter. Cllr Kiloh was invited to speak. She confirmed that the Cemeteries Order of 1977 permits consecration of part of a cemetery; provided that a sufficient part is not set apart for any particular religious denomination. Cllr Kiloh reported that since the consecration of Battle Cemetery in 1988, the Council has been in breach of this Order as there have been no unconsecrated land suitable for burials. In line with other municipal cemeteries, including Hastings, it was not planned to consecrate the new cemetery. She emphasised that this was not intended to be discriminatory towards Christian residents but to provide facilities for all. Following an informal meeting with the Dean of Battle, the Council will consider consecrating areas within the new cemetery although there are sufficient consecrated plots available for several years, based on current usage. The Clerk will also be amending the application for interment forms to include preference or none for consecrated or unconsecrated plots. This will provide data to assist the Council in planning for future provision. Finally, Cllr Kiloh reported that the opening of the new cemetery has been postponed.

A member of the public highlighted that Claverham Community College records show a majority report being of 'no faith'.

The Dean stated that he was satisfied with the suggested solution and asked that the Council consider the opening of the cemetery be combined with the consecrating of land by the Bishop.

What will it take for the housing development on the Blackfriars land to go ahead?

Cllr Dixon reported that a full response had been requested but not received. He did confirm that the initial planning application for the development stated that the road would be built first.

Why doesn't Rother DC/ESCC explain why parking offences can't be decriminalised?.....

Cllr Field confirmed that there are only 17 authorities in the whole country that do not have civil parking enforcement (CPE): Rother and Wealden are two of these. She reported that RDC must request ESCC to implement this and that she and other are applying significant pressure for RDC to reconsider their opposition to CPE. This issue will be further discussed in July. Cllr Field encouraged residents to write to Rother with their concerns and support for CPE.

A member of the public highlighted a recent issue with the police in response to cones placed on the road outside his property to prevent further damage to the canopy. Insp Russell responded that no alienation of the community is intended and further communication will be arranged. In relation to parking issues in general, Insp Russell confirmed that the Police, County and Town

Councils are pressing for Civic Parking Enforcement (CPE) to be adopted. Once this is agreed, further measures will be put in place until implementation of the new scheme.

3. Battle Neighbourhood Plan

Maurice Holmes, Chairman of BNP Steering Group reported the progress to date on the formulating and drafting of the draft document which will determine the path that Battle follows in the next decade. He emphasised that there is much work remaining and that the initial consultation as presented at this meeting is an important part of the process. He asked that the questionnaire be completed by as many residents as possible to enable the wishes of the community to be incorporated into the Plan. Mr Holmes highlighted the need for more volunteers to join the Steering Group to take this project through to the final stage.

Cllr Furness thanked Maurice Holmes and members of the Steering Group for their hard work to date.

4. Presentation of Civic Award

Cllr Furness presented the Community Award to Bev Marks for his great commitment to the Town through his involvement in a large variety of groups and organisations. Mr Marks expressed his huge surprise and grateful thanks for the Award.

5. Questions to individual or community groups who have received grants from BTC

There were no questions raised.

Simon Alexander, on behalf of the Concorde 1066 group expressed his thanks to all those that supported the wonderful and unique event on October 14.

6. Rotary Club of Battle

Tim Harrison, current President, reported on the support both internationally and locally offered by the Club. He highlighted the regular events: Christmas party for elderly residents; Rotary Young Writers' competition; and 1066 sponsored walk. Mr Harrison announced a new initiative to assist primary schools with educational requirements. He encouraged enquiries from prospective new members.

6.a The Dean, The Very Revd Canon John Edmondson, PhD

John Edmondson reminded those present of the tragic accident which had resulted in the death of Debbie Masters. He advised that the Masters family had been deeply moved by the love and concern shown by the community who had provided much valued comfort and practical support. The Dean asked that residents do not avoid speaking with Ian Masters as he welcomed contact.

7. District/County Councillors

Cllr Dixon advised that he is one of 5 District Councillors for the Battle area; although the boundaries will be changing in 2019 so that there will be 3 from that point. He confirmed that the waste contract with Kier will soon be replaced and that despite local opposition, planning consent has been granted for outline permission at Lily Bank Farm. Cllr Dixon highlighted that the Community Grants scheme has started and offers 50% match funding for new projects.

In response to a question, Cllr Field confirmed that although the Link Road does not appear to have alleviated the traffic issues at The Ridge; it is hoped that the Queensway/A21 link due to be finished in the New Year will resolve the issue.

Cllr Field reported that the County has faced further financial challenges and is working hard to make savings. She confirmed that the precept increase of 5% included an extra 2% for adult social care which is in crisis. She highlighted the 'better together' working with other councils to give a better service with easier accessibility. Cllr Field emphasised that the education standards are improving but that there is a need for more foster carers to give a good home and improved life to young people.

8. Open forum

Maurice Holmes confirmed that the Neighbourhood Plan questionnaires should be returned by 13 May to the Town Council office.

There were five queries raised in relation to the Town Council's plan to purchase a replacement Mayoral Chain of Office at a cost of £5,000. Cllr Furness reported that Members had unanimously agreed that the current Chain does not befit such an important and historic town. He advised that loaned regalia was used for the 950th Concorde event and it is proposed to provide a new insignia for the Civic Leader and whole community to be proud for many years. Cllr Jessop highlighted the generous donations for the provision of the roundabout statue and suggested that he would be willing to pay for the Chain of Office and felt sure that there would be others willing to contribute.

In response to a concern that the precept has risen disproportionately to wages, Cllr Jessop confirmed that, as a result of several years with low or no increase, the Council proposes to bring reserves to an acceptable level, as recommended by auditors, within the next 3 years.

In response to a suggestion that Battle is treated unfairly against Bexhill by Rother District Council, Cllr Field confirmed that resources are allocated on a perceived basis of need. Cllr Dixon encouraged residents to contact their District Councillors with any specific issues.

Cllr Field, in reply to a question relating to the provision of a primary school at Blackfriars, reported that the existing primary school has enough provision for all Battle children.

There was concern raised at suspected professional beggars in Battle. Insp Russell confirmed that the Police are aware and the situation is being monitored.

In bringing the Assembly to a close Cllr Furness thanked all present for their attendance.