

Battle Parish Assembly 2019

The following notes summarise the proceedings at the Assembly held on 23 April 2019 at the Memorial Hall, High Street, Battle at 7.30pm.

1. Welcome from Chairman and opening remarks

The Chairman welcomed those present and expressed pleasure at how many had attended. He suggested that, as it is important to cater for all ages, it would be good to also welcome more from the younger generation to the meetings. Cllr Furness highlighted that he had been a Town Councillor for 7 years, including 3 as Chairman and would now be standing down. He thanked his fellow Councillors for all their efforts with many achievements as a result.

Cllr Furness thanked Saxonwood Women's Institute for, once again, producing the tea and coffee and highlighted the effort made by various groups and organisations to display their activities.

The Chairman confirmed that any questions and comments directed at the Town Council will be recorded and considered by the new Council for response.

2. Written questions submitted prior to meeting

Eleven residents had raised questions and these were read by the Town Clerk with responses given by the relevant the relevant Committee Chairman or Convener of the Working Group. These are attached at Annex A.

3. Sussex Police

Acting Insp Jonathan Hartley (JH) empathised with the feelings of residents regarding the changes undertaken to policing of the area over the past eighteen months; particularly in relation to the loss of local Police Community Support Officers(PCSOs) resulting in a lack of visibility. He highlighted the increase in the police portion of precept/council tax which is promised to be invested for local policing. JH confirmed that intelligence is continually gathered both locally and with the Kent force to identify criminal groups. He reported that many local stations are being closed with main hubs being used. JH confirmed that although parking is not a priority it continues to be actioned when possible. He highlighted an increase in issues of modern day slavery and drug enterprises. JH confirmed that the 101 system causes much frustration but felt optimistic that this will be resolved. In response to questions JH requested that all information of criminal activity continue to be reported to the police. He agreed to forward information on the provision of Special Constables to the Town Clerk.

The Chairman thanked Acting Insp Jonathan Hartley for his report.

4. Almonry redevelopment

On behalf of the Town Council, Cllr Margaret Kiloh (MK) presented the proposal to apply for a loan of up to £600,000 to cover the cost of capital works to the Almonry building. She highlighted that the Grade 2* listed building has undergone many transformations from its origins as a medieval hall house. MK reported that the Council took over responsibility of the property on behalf of the people of Battle in 1987; it therefore has a duty to manage the town's asset by both preserving the fabric and ensuring that its facilities are improved with access extended for the benefit of the community. She confirmed that costs are subject to tender although, an indication from a Quantity Surveyor confirms that, three quarter of the loan is required to cover the repair and preservation of the fabric of the building to conservation standards, the modernisation of services and improvement of access for the mobility impaired. MK highlighted that much of the building, including the roof, tile cladding and internal decorative features is suffering from the ravages of time with modernisation of its electric, plumbing and central heating systems deemed necessary. She reported that roof, condition and structural surveys will be undertaken prior to the loan application being submitted. MK reported that internal works will be carried out to enable

greater flexibility for use, together with a change in location for office staff, Rother District Council staff and Council Chamber. She stated that approximately one quarter of the cost will be used to rebuild the southern wing of the Almonry. This will restore the historical integrity of the building, provide easy wheelchair access and disabled toilet facilities for the whole building and create a multi-function space for use by the Council and private hirers.

MK completed the presentation by confirming that the Council feels it would be a dereliction of its duty not to proceed with the proposed renovation and improvement of the Almonry and that the only feasible way to fund this is through a capital loan. She emphasised that all stages of the proposal had undergone due process including public consultation in January. MK reported that, dependant on final sum applied for, the cost to the Council Tax payer of servicing the loan will be in the region of £7.72 per year, or 17p per week for a Band D property.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Kiloh for presenting on behalf of the Council.

5. Battle Heritage Charter

Cllr Allan Russell (AR), on behalf of the Town Council, presented the Charter to the meeting. He highlighted that the purpose is to maintain and protect the historic character and scenic setting of Battle, Telham and Netherfield. AR highlighted the pressures of developments, traffic congestion, parking and turnover of shops and businesses with balancing the retention of notable natural features of the land. He confirmed that the Council has undertaken to embed the Charter in the work of all Council actions. AR reported that the local Heritage list will include buildings and green spaces of historic character or local significance and will be included in the Neighbourhood Plan. He asked that all submissions be made via the Council for consideration by the Working Group. Finally, AR confirmed that the work is ongoing with a walk-by survey of post 1910 buildings and designed landscapes of interest.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Russell and the Heritage Charter Working Group for their work in producing this document.

The Chairman reported that, due to ill health, there would be no presentation on Project Discovery - Modern Day Slavery.

6. 1066 Country Community First Responders

Adam Streater (AS), CFR Team Leader, East Emergency Operations reported that Community First Responders (CFR) work in conjunction with the Ambulance Service and respond to 999 calls within their home area in their own fully equipped vehicles. He emphasised that volunteers are trained and come from a range of age, life and work experience. AS confirmed that expenses are paid, but there is no remuneration or funding from the National Health Service and all have one aim – to help communities and save lives. He reported that Battle has no CFRs with ambulances being called from the Conquest or Bohemia in Hastings. AS advised that they have worked with the Town Council to provide training for the defibrillators installed around the town; although he emphasised that the equipment can be used without formal training.

Finally, AS encouraged all those interested in volunteering to become a Community First Responder to speak to him or contact the Town Council for his details.

The Chairman thanked Adam Streater for presenting to the meeting at short notice and for his immense dedication to the well-being of others.

Cllr Furness interrupted the meeting to report that the current Town Clerk, Carol Harris had now served the Council for 20 years. In recognition of this and with grateful thanks, a presentation of a silver pin was made.

7. Community Award

The Chairman reminded those present that nominations had been invited for deserving people of Battle. He reported that, encouragingly, several recommendations were received and considered by Council Members. Cllr Furness stated that several nominations had been received for one contender who has always shown a great love of the town and continues to work to support and promote the town's interests and wellbeing. He highlighted that the winner of the Community Award was first known as the pharmacist in the town, but that his many voluntary roles have included Town Councillor and Chairman/Mayor, various positions with the Battle Memorial Halls, Muffins, Bonfire Boyes, Battle Club, Film Society and BLOG, and remains an integral part of the Battle Museum of Local History. The Chairman announced the Council's delight to present this year's Community Award to Robert Emeleus.

8. District/County Councillors

Cllr Kathryn Field (KF), East Sussex County Council reported that a year with less money and less services had been experienced as a result of limiting the council tax increase to prevent an expensive referendum. She confirmed £5m of cuts had been made and that at the end of 2018 a "core offer" had been consulted on. KF was sad to announce that the subsidy for "meals on wheels" had been removed which it was feared would increase community isolation. She was pleased to confirm that Children's Services had received an Outstanding OFSTED report and was hopeful that cuts would not be made to this service. KF reported that the closure of the skateboard ramp was disappointing as activities for youth remain important. She confirmed that the County Council had agreed to pass the removal costs to the Town Council to restore the equipment.

Cllr Kevin Dixon (KD), Rother District Council highlighted the lack of other Battle District Councillors at this meeting. He reported that there is no longer a grant from central government so, to increase revenue, the Council is investing in commercial properties in Bexhill. KD advised that the waste and recycling contract will be moving to BIFFA this year. He reported that the Civil Enforcement is now with the County Council for action. KD highlighted the Community Grants that had been issued to the town including one for the levelling of the junior football pitch. He reminded those present that small grants of £500 are available. KD reported that, following consultation, the link road at Blackfriars has been submitted for planning permission which indicates 220 dwelling for this area; this is in addition to 63 at Tollgates, 20 for North Trade Road, 50 at Wattles Wish and 25 for Darvel Down. He asked that, in light of a change to one of the polling stations, polling cards are read carefully. Finally, KD recommended signing to the Rother Alerts to ensure all information is received.

The Chairman thanked Cllrs Field and Dixon for their reports.

9. Open forum

The Chairman reminded those present that all questions and comments for the Town Council would be recorded and considered by the new Council.

He invited Stephen Bradshaw, Chairman of Battle Twinning Association to the floor.

Mr Bradshaw (SB) reported that the Battle Twinning Association had raised £1118 towards curtains for the St Valery Room and presented a cheque to Mike Clarke, Chairman of Battle Memorial Halls. Mr Clarke thanked the Association for the donation and reminded those present that the Memorial Hall facilities include a full theatre and three other halls for a variety of hires.

It was suggested that a way to encourage more young people to meetings such as this was needed.

In response to a question, Cllr Field reported that although there are good site lines for a pedestrian crossing at Battle Hill, there is no footway. This is an issue and engineers are considering a solution to this.

Whilst not against repairs to the Almonry, concern was expressed at the provision of a wedding venue and a café, the latter had previously lost money when based in the Almonry. A question for the new Town Council to consider: Could the Council look again at expenditure required?

It was stated that a café is required in the recreation ground as a vital community hub for children, their parents and their grandparents. An outside provider, using Council facilities should also be considered.

Suggestions for the new Town Council to consider: a further consultation in relation to the Almonry project; costs for the provision of a café to be published.

A complaint that a property photograph on the Heritage Charter display had not been permitted was made.

Statements that the Council had been negligent in not maintaining the Almonry for over 10 years and that the Memorial Halls and Emmanuel Centre have adequate rooms for hire. Cllr Furness agreed that previous administrations had not addressed this problem and the current Council have been investigating ways of undertaking this work since 2015. He highlighted that Rother District Council will be joining the Town Council to help create a community hub with organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau using the facilities.

A question for the new Town Council to consider: In the absence of any demonstrable need for additional meeting space in the town or a business plan to justify the development aspects of the Almonry project, will the Council abandon the plan in favour of one which focusses solely on essential repairs to the historic fabric?

A statement highlighting the small number of responses from 6500 residents to the consultation on the Almonry project with a suggestion that all Councillors resign.

A request for a safety alert sign to be erected close to the Telham Playing Field.

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

There being no further matters, the meeting closed at 9.15pm.