



# Battle Town Council



Minutes of the COUNCIL MEETING held on  
TUESDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2024 at The Almonry, High Street Battle at 7.30pm

**Present:** Cllrs V Cook (Chairman), A Barton, B Brown, S Burton, D Buss, A Ratcliffe, D Russell, D Silk, C Sprong and D Wheeler

**In Attendance:** Eight members of the public, County/District Cllr K Field, C Harris (Town Clerk)

## PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

A member of the public, and member of the Council's Climate & Ecology Sub Committee, on behalf of concerned residents, highlighted the need for Council to adopt a Policy to support the acknowledgement of the Climate Emergency, at item 11.

1. **Apologies for absence** – None.
2. **Disclosure of interest** – Cllr V Cook declared an interest in items 14 and 17 as Chairman of Rother District Council. Cllr S Burton declared an interest in items 14 and 17 as a Rother District Councillor. Cllr Sprong declared an interest in item 18a a Judge for the Marbles Competition.
3. **The minutes of the Council Meeting on 30 January 2024** were agreed and duly signed by Cllr Cook.
4. **Presentation on La Mora tapestry**  
The Chairman welcomed T Greene (TG) to the meeting and invited her to address Council. TG reported that 2027 will be the 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of William's birth and there are plans for commemorative events in Normandy France, including the construction of In Honfleur, a cop of La Mora, the boat which Matilda commissioned for William for the invasion. TC presented her proposal to copy a section of the Bayeux Tapestry to donate to Normandy. She reported support from several notable persons and asked for the support of the Council and community to help take this project forward.

*One member of the public left the meeting.*

5. **Applications for co-option to Council**  
Completed applications had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting. Andrew Brown(AB) and Marie-Louise Neill(MN) were welcomed to the meeting. Both candidates had previously been Town Councillors and highlighted their skills and experience. **Members agreed unanimously to co-opt A Brown to the Telham Ward and M-L Neill to the Watch Oak Ward.**
6. **Report from the Town Clerk**
  - The agreed **precept request** had been submitted to Rother District Council (RDC), as required.
  - A discussion on suggested sites for the **Miyawaki micro wood** was held with a RDC officer. It was highlighted that this will be completely facilitated by RDC, with volunteers coordinated by them. Additional sites put forward at the end of Marley Rise and on the northernmost bend of Coronation Gardens will be considered and discussed with Southern Housing, as land owners. Unfortunately, the existing trees on the land at the entrance to Battle Gates make the site unsuitable for a Micro Wood, although as with the other sites being reviewed, it could present an opportunity for a **Community Orchard**, should there be a local group willing to establish one there. This latter scheme is for a small area of a minimum 5 fruit or nut trees. Applications are expected to be invited from early April. This will be placed on the next Estates Agenda for consideration.



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- The **Statement on the Budget for 2024-25** will be circulated shortly.

## 7. Reports from County Councillor and District Councillors

### County

Cllr Field reported that: the **budget** had been agreed at **4.99%**, to include a 2% adult social care increase, and using reserves to avoid more cuts; additional funds from Government will be used for further **pothole repairs**; **Children's Services** had received a Good Ofsted report, with some Outstanding features eg looked-after children; a Care Quality Commission inspection on **Adult Social Services** is expected. In response to a question Cllr Field reported that the **Battle Hill crossing scheme** remains in the capital programme; revised design is still awaited.

### District

Cllr Field reported that £165k had been awarded for **electric vehicle charging in car parks** in Battle, Camber and Bexhill. Unfortunately, the electricity supply was not adequate for provision in Rye.

Cllr Burton reported that the amendments to the **Blackfriars development** had been approved with conditions; this had included the removal of affordable housing but this would be monitored for reintroduction if feasible.

Members expressed frustration at the apparent lack of attention to Council's comments, Design Guidelines etc. District Councillors reiterated that conditions imposed address some of the concerns raised.

Cllr Field reported that she had challenged the comment that the amendments did not constitute a new planning application when a S73 had been applied. She is awaiting a response.

Cllr Cook reported on behalf of all District Councillors that:

- the Draft **Revenue Budget Proposals, Key Performance Indicators** and the **New Housing Allocations Policy** had been scrutinised;
- like many other councils, RDC is facing a very tight budget and is having to **use reserves** and **cut projects**. All departments had been asked to streamline budgets and consider how to improve methods of working to save money;
- the **budget consultation** had attracted 694 responses, plus a petition regarding the closure of toilets;
- a proposal **to levy tax on second and /or empty homes** was scrutinised and later discussed at Cabinet;
- the **New Housing Allocations Policy consultation** was held in 2023 (BTC was one of 5 Parish or Town Councils to respond) and changes made to reflect these comments. These changes were scrutinised by the members and this will be discussed at the Full Council meeting in February;
- an additional meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny has been called for 19<sup>th</sup> February to scrutinise the **Local Plan**;
- Cllr Cook had chaired a meeting of the **Digital and Customer Services Strategy T&FG** and subsequently spent a day in the Town Hall sitting on reception and in the call centre before moving to the **Housing and Homelessness** department. She stated that it was an extremely worthwhile day;
- a meeting of the **Climate Change Steering Group**;
- held a meeting with members of the **Rother DC Housing Company** to discuss the **Blackfriars** and Spine Road;



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- attended the Cabinet meeting where it was agreed to form a T&F to review **Planning Enforcements Plan** and not to accept an increase in their **member's allowance** which had been planned;
- As Chairman to the RDC, Cllr Cook hosted a **thank you lunch for RDC officers** which was very enjoyable and informative;
- **Cllr Cook's portrait** has been placed on the wall at the Bexhill Town Hall.

## 8. Finance matters

- a. The **list of income at £29,322.35 and expenditure of £80,613.35 for December 2023**, both net of account transfers was noted, as attached.
- b. Members noted the **bank reconciliation to 31 December 2023** and agreed that the Chairman sign these as attached.

## 9. Draft minutes and consider any recommendations from Standing Committee meetings:

- a. Cllr Cook presented the draft Minutes of the **Finance & General Purposes Committee** meeting on 23 January 2024. These were noted.
- b. Cllr Brown gave a verbal report on the **Estates Committee** held on 6 February 2024. He highlighted the significant changes to the budget for 2024-25; the amendments to the Allotment Agreement and Cemetery Regulations; an agreement to investigate concerns of asbestos at the dis-used storage shed at the cemetery; a report from the Pavilion Fundraising T&FG; confirmation of successful grant application to Sussex Lund for environmental improvements at the recreation ground and Guild Shaw; and the discussion of three confidential, potentially legal, matters. Draft Minutes to be circulated shortly.
- c. Cllr Wheeler presented the draft Minutes of the **Planning & Transport Committee** meeting on 13 February 2024. These were noted. Cllr Wheeler reminded Members to forward any topics for the Strengthening Local Relationships meeting with East Sussex Highways, to the Clerk as soon as possible. Following discussion on the proposal to support a **20mph limit** from the High Street to Claverham Community College on North Trade Road; Virgins Lane on London Road; Coronation Gardens on Marley Lane; petrol station on Battle Hill; and Powdermill Lane at the roundabout Members asked the Clerk to circulate the slide presentation from 20's Plenty. It was suggested that all new developments should be automatically restricted to 20mph. Members agreed to discuss this further. **Cllr Ratcliffe agreed to join the Battle Community Speed Watch team.**

## 10. Standing Committees

Members agreed the appointment of Cllr Andrew Brown to the Planning & Transport Committee and Cllr Marie-Louise Neill to Estates and Town Development & External Committees.

## 11. Statement on Climate Change

A draft document had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting. Cllr Barton reminded Members that the Climate Emergency had been acknowledged in June 2023 and suggested that the Climate Literacy training, undertaken by many Councillors and Officers, had identified the urgency of Council consideration to the Climate and Ecological Emergency in all actions, where feasible. It was highlighted that Council already do a great deal to reduce its carbon footprint and that promotion of this is necessary to encourage residents to duplicate appropriate actions. Subject to minor amendment, the **Statement on Climate Change** was agreed unanimously, as attached.

## 12. Rural grass cutting



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Members discussed the two options presented by East Sussex County Council and agreed unanimously that a change to the Environmental Enhancement Service (reduced rural service) which, excluding single track lanes, would provide the first cut at start of season to be only visibility cuts for safety at junctions and on the inside of bends where sight lines between road users may be obscured by vegetation. The second cut later in the season will be visibility plus a 1 metre wide swathe along the verge. The Clerk was asked to ensure that the reasons for this decision are published on the website.

## 13. Annual Report

The draft Report had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting. Subject to slight wording amendments to ensure clear, factual messages, the Annual Report format was approved and will be sent for publication and distribution later this week. Volunteers to circulate the document to Netherfield are sought.

## 14. Station Master's House

An update report produced by Cllr Cook had been circulated providing the background, proposed use and questions currently raised on the Tenancy at Will (TAW) for the Station Master's House. It was highlighted that Southeast Community Rail Partnership had approached Council with a proposal for a TAW for the Station Master's House at a peppercorn rent plus legal costs, for its use by the community upon completion of renovation and restoration works. Following a visit to Bat & Ball Station and a Full Council discussion, it was agreed to proceed. There is a kitchenette in the ground floor room and three first floor, medium sized rooms which could be used for a variety of purposes, particularly intimate meetings or hot-desking. Some communication between SCRP and a new help hub, Sussex Outreach Service (SOS), had indicated a wish to use the ground-floor and one first-floor room twice a week, although there is an expectation for this to be for free. A presentation had been made to Marketing Sub Committee by Dr Sarah Jacques and Andy Pope (SCRP) about this project in November.

At production of the Heads of Terms, the responsibility of utilities had been transferred to the Council. At a late stage, £12,000 had been added to the budget for 2024-25 for this expenditure, with no sum added for income, at this time.

It was noted that SCRP have arranged an Official Opening and handover of keys for 23 February 2024, although the formal proposed commencement date is 1 April 2024.

Following a site visit by Councillors and examination of the TAW, several questions had been raised with the SCRP Solicitor, including clarification of use of the facility, with a specific question relating to possible provision of a coffee kiosk. A response is awaited. A Business Plan and marketing strategy is being produced, as previously agreed, prior to signing of a TAW.

The Clerk reported that the Town Model had been collected from its 5year storage facilities and that it was in a good general condition, although it is far larger than anticipated. It was no longer felt that the SMH would be an appropriate home for it.

Members comprehensively discussed concerns raised at: the additional costs to residents, particularly in relation to the unexpected Business Rates liability; the unknown demand for the additional facility; and Council's decision to take on the building with no Business Plan. **It was reiterated that the TAW should not be signed until a Business Plan had been produced and discussed by Council.**



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## 15. Policy, Terms and Conditions and fees for Exhibitions

The documents were agreed unanimously, as attached.

## 16. The Almonry

The Clerk reported that the work to **the chimney** is mostly complete, with external making good items remaining. There has been no further contact from the main contractor, Vulcan Ellis and the contract is now considered complete.

The additional works to the **ex Clerk's Office and WC**, removed from previous contract, are virtually complete. There is an outstanding discussion on the completion of the ambulant toilet in the courtyard area.

There has been no interest in letting of **Suite 6** to date.

The Clerk was asked to arrange for the timing for light in the courtyard to be adjusted.

*Cllrs Burton and Cook repeated their interest in the following item.*

*Members agreed to suspend Standing Orders to allow B Brown to speak as a member of Residents Against Unauthorised Development in Netherfield.*

## 17. Report on Judicial Review

BB reported that this action had been taken out on behalf of a group of Netherfield residents against a planning decision made by Rother District Council (RDC). In December RDC consented to Judgement on one of the grounds which results in the planning consent being quashed. Agreement on costs has now been reached. To date, occupiers of the site have not engaged with the Court.

This will be returned for a Court Hearing on 27 February 2024 for further action. On behalf of the group of residents, BB thanked the Council for its support in this action.

*Standing Orders were reinstated.*

*Two members of the public left the meeting.*

*Cllr Sprong repeated her interest in the following item.*

## 18. Abbey Green

a) Members agreed the use for the Annual Good Friday Marbles Competition on 29 March. **It was agreed that a men's team would be entered to represent Council.**

b) Members discussed the history and previous years' **Boxing Day Meet** events and considered the request to use the Abbey Green on Boxing Day 2024. It was noted that Road Closure Orders and Public Space Protection Orders (including dogs on leads) are matters for Rother District Council to consider. As with all users of Council property, a copy of insurance documents and risk assessments are required, together with a deposit against any damage. It was noted that there had been no objection from English Heritage or Sussex Police in relation to this traditional event, which is reported as a legal activity. Subject to the usual conditions, confirmation that no illegal activity is taking place, and a reminder that the access road to the EH car park must be kept clear at all times, **Members agreed by a majority the use of the Abbey Green by the East Sussex & Romney Marsh Hounds on Boxing Day 2024.**

## 19. Correspondence and communications received post Agenda circulation

- Cllr Brown agreed to represent Council at the **South East Water breakfast meeting** on Friday 23 February, to receive information on several schemes in the area; one from 3 Cups to Heathfield that will impact Battle but will not be subject to a complete closure

## 20. Members noted:

- a) Minutes from **Twinning Association** meeting on 2 November 2023
- b) **PCSO report** for January 2024



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## 21. Reports from representatives of the Council and other reports

- Cllr Russell - Climate Literacy training;  
- Civility & Respect training  
- a discussion with Energise Sussex Coast for advice on solar panels to the Almonry.

*One member of the public left the meeting.*

- Cllr B Brown - Battle Memorial Hall Committee;  
- Chamber of Commerce.

- Cllr A Barton - Climate Literacy training;  
- Civility & Respect training;  
- a visit to the Station Master's House;  
- carried out a Dark Skies monitoring session.

- Cllr Sprong - a visit to the Station Master's House.

- Cllr Silk - Climate Literacy training;  
- met with David Field of the Nature Recovery Network to learn about Dark Skies accreditation, which may require an amendment to the Battle CP Neighbourhood Plan.

- Cllr Buss - Chamber of Commerce;  
- Chamber of Commerce breakfast meeting;  
- Beautiful Battle Committee;

- Cllr Cook - report attached.

- Cllr Burton - Battle Area Community Transport AGM;  
- a webinar for reporting back to funders for the cycle skills area;  
- Climate Literacy training;  
- Civility & Respect training;  
- secrets of a successful bus operation.

- Cllr Wheeler - Climate Literacy training;  
- Civility & Respect training;  
- Battle Area Community Transport AGM.

## 22. Future agenda items / matters to note

- To consider amendment to Standing orders

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 22.02.

Cllr V Cook  
Chairman