Battle Parish Assembly 2023

The following notes summarise the proceedings at the Assembly held on 4th March 2023 at Battle & Langton CE School, Market Road, Battle at 6.00pm.

Approximately 100 attendees plus County, District and Town Councillors. The Town Clerk took the notes.

Cllr Cook, Chairman of Battle Town Council welcomed everyone to the meeting, highlighted the emergency exits and thanked County Cllr Field, District Cllr Dixon and Ms Ford and Ms Evett from Rother District Council for attending the meeting. She expressed hope that the various stands had provided interesting information about what is going on in our community and reminded attendees that the Parish Assembly is not a Council meeting, but rather a gathering of electors that is facilitated by the Town Council. Cllr Cook thanked Mr Hughes, headmaster of the school and members of the Parent Teacher Association for hosting and providing refreshments and Battle Abbey School for the loan of the display boards.

The delivery to every household of the Town Council's Annual Report which outlines the work of the Council, including projects undertaken, begun or completed as well as proposals for further improvements was noted. It was highlighted that, to keep the Council's precept increase to below 3%, many proposed projects had been postponed. Residents were encouraged to suggest to Council any potential, feasible schemes to take forward in future.

A consultation to seek the preference on three proposed projects to improve access for pedestrians (and in one case cyclists too) around the town was reported, confirming that details are also published on the projects page of the Council's website.

The Council's commitment to reduce its carbon footprint was matched by the encouraging number of environmental stands at the Assembly.

The Chairman reported on the many events she had represented the Council, including the Platinum Jubilee which was then, unfortunately, followed by the funeral of the Beloved Queen Elizabeth II.

Awards

Cllr Glenna Favell reported on the many exciting entries received for the seniors' category of the Writing Competition on Beginner's Luck. She presented the winner's award to Jessalyn Berry and advised that the piece will be featured in the Council's next Newsletter.

Cllr Vikki Cook reminded those present that nominations are invited annually to nominate local residents who have made a significant, positive and outstanding contribution to the local community. She reported that following several inspirational nominations, including two for individuals that have been integral to the Battle Food Bank, Council had decided to make an award to all the invaluable Volunteers of Battle Foodbank in recognition of the enormous contribution this group make to our residents particularly during the recent Pandemic and the current economic crises.

The Community Award for 2023 was presented to Tamzin Gray following her tireless work, with other volunteers, to ensure the success of many Battle events for over 20 years, including her ten years as Chairman of the Christmas Committee.

Cllr Sue Burton highlighted that the ECO Youth Awards is a result of Battle Town Forum's wish to raise awareness of the Climate emergency. An invitation for individuals, groups or families to complete 6 challenges to Conserve Energy, Reduce Waste, Save Water, Protect Wildlife, Increase Biodiversity and

then Raise awareness was sent out to schools, uniformed organisations and put on the BTC website. Cllr Burton presented awards to Freya and Lydia for their amazing reports; and for exceptional entries to Jessica and Amelia.

The Claverham Wombles, eco warriors, gave an interesting and fun presentation on the importance of raising awareness and taking action to care for our environment to ensure the safety of future generations.

Community Groups reported on "Just One Thing" that could help with the reduction of individual carbon footprints: eat less meat; eat everything that has been bought; re-use; protect trees; reduce number of journeys made; less garden lights for more wildlife; support local business; research energy efficiency.

Councillor

The Chairman reported that the Town Council should have 13 Councillors for its 4 Wards. Councillors represent the people who live in their wards: signpost to information or help with particular issues; represent residents' views at meetings; and they are a willing listening ear. She highlighted that there are legal requirements to become a Councillor and that the next election takes place on Thursday May 4th on the same day as District elections. She reminded residents to take a photo ID to the polling stations.

She emphasised that being a councillor is hard but very rewarding work.

Cllrs Allan Russell and Paul Strip provided a question-and-answer session of frequently asked questions such as:

Q Why be a Councillor. A Giving back to the community and passionate about the town and want to try to improve the area for all;

Q What the Town Council does. A First tier of Government, agrees precept from Council tax to spend money on improving the quality of life for residents and visitors to the town;

Q Who is in charge. A No one person, the Council is non-political and decisions are made democratically. The Clerk guides on legal matters;

Q Is any training available. A Yes, all Councillors are offered high quality training, often via Zoom and support is available;

Q Any payment. A No payment but a Parish Basic Allowance, for elected Councillors, to assist with basic costs at £240pa plus expenses for out-of-town travel;

Q Can full-time employed people with dependents be a Councillor. A Yes, it is challenging to balance the time but most meetings are held on a regular basis to better manage;

Q What to do if thinking of being a Councillor. A Speak with the Clerk or a Councillor.

Devolution of Discretionary Services

Lorna Ford(LF) and Anna Evett(AE) from Rother District Council(RDC) presented on the possible devolvement of some services to Town and Parish Councils; for Battle the two public toilets at Mount Street and Market Square; and grounds maintenance is being offered.

It was highlighted that the increased costs, reduction in central government funding and restriction on council tax increase is forcing some difficult decisions to be made.

In relation to the public toilets, LF reported that these would be offered on a leasehold basis, following a condition survey and £15k per facility (total of £30k) would be provided for improvements. It is proposed that these could be devolved from April 2024.

Various areas for grounds maintenance had been identified and it was confirmed that these cost approximately £45k per year. LF reported that the transfer to sports clubs may be possible for appropriate areas.

Cllr Kevin Dixon advised that RDC continue to explore ways of reducing costs as it is not sustainable to use reserves and that Localism is important.

It was suggested that empty shops discouraged tourism and results in less income for the town and RDC.

In response to concerns at the road gritting procedures, Cllr Kathryn Field reported that only main roads can be gritted by East Sussex Highways, with the pot hole gangs used to cover this task when necessary; new bins are not routinely provided; and that existing bin supplies should only be used for roads, and not private driveways.

There were different views on charging for use of toilets.

The Chairman reported that Council would carefully consider devolvement.

Resilience
A brief report on the need for volunteers for any emergency situation was made, highlighting recent need for community support eg Covid; Storm Eunice sudden, heavy snowfall. Residents were asked to contact the Council if they wish to be involved in the emergency plan.

Sgt Booth was welcomed to the meeting.

Open Forum
Concern at vehicle speeds through the town was raised with a further request for consideration to a 20mph speed limit which would also assist with air pollution. It was confirmed that Council are exploring ways to progress this, including the use of a Black Cat data collection system.

The objections by three residents to the 2019/20 Annual Governance Statement on the Almonry loan was highlighted. The Clerk confirmed that a response is still awaited from the Auditor and that the result will be published.

In response to a question on electric vehicle charging points, it was confirmed that RDC have submitted an application for grant funding for EVC points in both Market Road and Mount Street car parks.

Frustration at the extensive pot holes on North Trade Road was expressed, suggesting that the many developments have exacerbated the situation. KF highlighted that this is not a problem isolated to NTR as 6000 potholes have been identified and engineers are discussing solutions to this problem.

It was reported that discussions with a developer in Netherfield is continuing in an attempt to provide a safe footway between developments to the shop and school. Unfortunately, a feasibility study, requested by the Council, for a footway between the Village Hall and Darvel Down had confirmed that it was not possible. Residents were invited to put forward any infrastructure suggestions for Council to consider.

In bringing the Assembly to a close Cllr Cook thanked all present for their attendance and wished all a very good evening.

There being no further matters, the meeting closed at 7.30pm.