



Battle Town Council

Minutes of the COUNCIL MEETING held on TUESDAY, 19th JANUARY 2021 via Zoom at 7.30pm

Present: Cllrs G Favell (Chairman), A Brown, V Cook, C Davies, J Gyngell, M Howell, M Kiloh, A Russell, H Sharman, D Wheeler and C Would.

In Attendance: County/District Cllr Field, District Cllr Dixon, eight members of the public, C Harris (Town Clerk).

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME 7.30pm to 7.45pm

A member of the public highlighted the Government's Stay at Home, Stay Safe message and expressed disappointment that, although legislation was complied with, the Agenda and associated documents had not been published on the website prior to the previous morning. He requested that the meeting be adjourned and raised four questions. The Clerk responded:

- **Agendas** had been placed on all notice boards. The delay in publication on the website was unintentional and due to annual leave and a misunderstanding between Officers. The failure to publish was rectified on Monday morning, as soon as acknowledged. Officers will attempt to ensure that this does not happen in future.
- Despite attempts to do so, the **Option to Tax** had not been completed but would be actioned prior to the commencement of the Almonry works.
- The **net figures** in all documents presented to the External Auditors were correct as the de minimis rule had not been breached and VAT had been reclaimed.
- **Invoices for architects and quantity surveyor** had not identified individual aspects of the project and could not be accurately split. *Post meeting note: document 2a Analysis of Professional fees, as attached, was an indicative calculation submitted with the response to the External Auditor.*
- It had been emphasised at several meetings that confirmation of **professional fees** was awaited to allow the completion of the draft Strategic Plan. Notification of these had been circulated to Council and published on the website as part of the Agenda papers.

The member of the public suggested that residents would be surprised in the uplift in expenditure.

1. **Apologies for absence** – Cllr C Hartley.

2. **Disclosure of interest** – None.

3. **Minutes of the Council meeting held on 15th December 2020** were agreed and duly electronically signed by Cllr Favell.

4. Report from the Clerk

- The **response to the Objection** raised with the **External Auditors** had been submitted and is published on the Council's website with the draft Minutes from the previous meeting. Confirmation of receipt has been received with advice that it may be some time until it is investigated due to workload.
- The **precept request**, as agreed at the previous meeting, had been issued to Rother District Council.
- The preferred contractor for the **pavilion re-build** had been notified and the fundraising consultant advised.

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- Progress is being made with arranging training for staff to undertake the **grass cutting** and research for an appropriate mower is ongoing.

5. County Councillor and District Councillors

County

Cllr Field(KF) reported:

- that Cabinet had agreed a 1.99% budget increase plus 1.5% for adult social care;
- the Scrutiny Committee had submitted a report on carbon neutrality with emphasis on solar panels on buildings but it did not extend to contractors. Homeworking was not identified;
- latest statistics on Covid variants and the vaccination programme for those over 80years. She confirmed that 2 homes in Eastbourne are providing a 'step down', beds for those leaving hospital but not well enough for returning home; 12½% of essential workers' children and vulnerable children are attending school; those entitled to free school meals are offered a choice of food voucher or food box; some laptops have been provided to assist with home schooling;
- the Registration Office is prioritising deaths over births.

District

Cllr Dixon apologised that he had been unable to attend the Council's recent Planning & Transport meeting, due to no internet access. He reported an extensive Cabinet meeting that had included discussions on its Corporate Plan, Climate Emergency, financial stability: reserves are to be built up, affordable housing, Town Council for Bexhill. Other matters highlighted: a new Surgery at Wainright Road; renovation work at Eastern Parade that would use labour from the Bexhill Heritage Group; the constitution of the Community Government Working Group that would include discussion on a precept to be charged for the Bexhill Town Council; confirmation of the approval, subject to minor comments, to take the Battle Civil Parish Neighbourhood Plan to Referendum when permitted; the purchase of temporary accommodation in Sidley. Cllr Dixon highlighted the importance in promoting the commencement of Covid vaccines in Etchingham today.

6. Correspondence and communications received post agenda publication

- An update from Huw Merriman MP on the **vaccination programme in Etchingham** to include Battle residents and the reasons for this location, although he is pushing for an easier solution. He had provided literature that identified contact details for **community and non-emergency transport** and the Clerk had arranged for this to be published on the Council's website and social media.
- An invitation from the **British Red Cross Sussex Branch** to become a Referral Partner for the **Hardship Fund**, initiated in partnership with Aviva and the Aviva Foundation in response to the coronavirus outbreak.
- An invitation from Rother District Council to attend a focus group meeting to discuss the **Rother Planning Service**. The Clerk will confirm the Council's interest in attending. Cllr Dixon reminded Members that both positive and negative comments would be appreciated.

7. To receive draft minutes and consider any recommendations from Committee meetings:

- Minutes of the **External Relations & Town Development Committee** on 5th January 2021 were presented by Cllr Sharman and noted. She highlighted that the Resilience Plan information is being collated; the Writing Competition winners had been notified and published in the latest Newsletter; and that it was agreed not to enter the Town in the

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2021 South & South East in Bloom competition. The Clerk was asked to contact the Heritage Charter Working Group with the Committee's decision to recommend dissolution of the Group now that the Heritage Charter List has been completed.

- Minutes of the **Planning & Transport Committee** on 12th January 2021 were presented by Cllr Gyngell and noted. She highlighted a meeting with RDC to discuss Electric Vehicle Charging points and that a separate meeting had been agreed to discuss the Blackfriars application. The RDC Development Project Manager would also be attending. The Clerk reported a discussion with the landowner of **Tills Yard about the boundary wall** and possible rebuild in an alternate material. It was agreed that discussions should be held with the landowner about the advantage of providing a **pedestrian gate** to improve connectivity during the proposed works before further discussion of this.

8. Battle Civil Parish Neighbourhood Plan

The Chairman reminded those present that on 11th January, Rother District Council's Cabinet approved the Plan to go forward for inspection. She, once again, expressed the Council's thanks to the group for their untiring work to make it happen.

Members were reminded that all residents and the Council are encouraged to complete the Rother District Council consultation by Friday 29th January 2021. The Clerk was asked to encourage residents to respond on social media platforms. Cllr Russell confirmed that some amendments had been suggested by RDC and these were being reviewed by the Steering Group for recommendation to Council.

9. Reports from Standing Committees

The six month reports had been circulated prior to the meeting and were noted.

10. Almonry Project

• Almonry Development Working Group

Cllr Kiloh confirmed that applications had been submitted to Historic England's COVID-19 Emergency Heritage at Risk Response Fund for emergency repairs and Rother District Council's Community Grant Fund towards a discrete project to provide full access for those with disabilities; both contributing to the overall improvements to the building. She highlighted the difficulty in disentangling costings for individual items and each submission had been for a contribution of £25,000. **Members agreed unanimously to use Almonry Ear Marked Reserves to provide match funding to the RDC Community Grant Fund for the accessibility access and toilet items.**

- To enable the project to proceed as agreed by Council, agreement for initial work to pre-contract at a maximum cost of £5,500 (mostly covered by previous approval of expenditure not utilised) was consulted via email and JD Clarke Architects appointed. The full detail of professional services to completion of the project had been circulated, as attached. Independent advice had been received that the fees costs are in accordance with the scope of work to an historic building. Following discussion, and in order that work can progress and the Strategic Plan can be finalised, **Members agreed by a majority to appoint the Architect, J D Clarke and the Quantity Surveyor, Blade Consulting and agreed the professional fees to completion of the project that total £42,679.76, which includes a contingency of £3,500 and the £5,500 approved via email.**
- Members were reminded that the current ground floor office contains a **large and extremely heavy safe**, which holds the cemetery record books. It is considered unsuitable for use in the

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refurbished building and research to sell it had been undertaken. Advice had been received that such items are no longer desirable and two quotes to remove and dispose of the safe had been received in the sum of £350 and £499. This item was purchased some years ago and is not identified on any asset registers. The Clerk reported that the storage of minute books and items requiring permanent retention may be stored free of charge at The Keep. Documents that may require review may be stored at a Record Centre, costs awaited. Research is ongoing for smaller, more manageable, fire safe solutions for on-site storage. It was noted that BCPNPSG documents will also require safe storage. **Members agreed that endeavours to sell or offer the safe for free removal should be made. If this was not achievable the Clerk was authorised to pay for the removal at a cost of £350.**

Two members of the public left the meeting.

11. East Sussex County Council

- The definition, location and results of a Rother District Council consultation on **rural verges** had been circulated, as attached. Subject to East Sussex County Council's criteria being complied with, verges will be cut by grounds staff from April. ESCC had also proposed a rural verge trial, as attached. Members considered the comments made by the Wild Meadow Group and Keith Datchler and agreed to take this project forward.
- A response from ESCC in relation to concerns of **black top repairs to footways** had reported that the current policy is to replace broken slabs and pavers with bituminous materials. There are 22 named streets excepted across the county where like-for-like materials are used, or local authorities fund the increase in cost of preferred materials. There are none in Battle. New policy discussion are ongoing between ESCC and RDC Conservation Officers to allow local councils to be consulted about maintenance programmes and for local councils to contribute to the 'upgrade' of materials. It was highlighted that there is a lack of resource to use preferred materials. Members agreed that this was unacceptable close to listed buildings and would not comply with the High Weald AONB Housing Design Guide or Battle Design Guidelines. The Chairman agreed to discuss this further at the next Strengthening Local Relationships meeting.

12. Oak tree

Members considered suitable locations for the donation of an Oak tree grown from an acorn at the cemetery. Cllr Cook agreed to speak to a local resident in relation to it offering a replacement for trees recently removed. Alternatively, Telham recreation ground was agreed.

13. Finance matters

- The **list of income of £25,997.37 and payments of £78,073.66**; excluding account transfers, were noted, as attached. It was noted that the payment to Moles Consultancy was incorrectly annotated as the final payment.
- No **Covid-19 Recovery Grant applications** had been received. Members raised a query in the apparent inconsistent wording of the Terms and Conditions in relation to second applications. This will be discussed at the next Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting.

14. Reports from representatives of the Council and other reports

Cllr Brown - BCPNPSG meetings;
Cllr Cook - volunteer for delivery of prescriptions and food for extremely clinically vulnerable. Attended a Strategic Rail Partnership meeting (not as Council

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representative) where potential use of redundant station buildings had been discussed;

- CLlr Gyngell - Rother Association of Local Councils: a new website is in process which will promote current projects such as the Black Cat Radar. The Council's wildflower verges had been praised;
- CLlr Howell - BCPNPSG meetings;
- CLlr Russell - BCPNPSG meetings;
- CLlr Wheeler - RALC and BCPNPSG meetings;
- CLlr Favell - as Mayor, visited Battle Food Bank on 16th December and met the volunteers. The Benedicta Whistler Room is not currently in use and the food bank is able to enjoy wide use the facility. When the Covid-19 situation starts to change significantly, this may change. It is important to maintain links in order to help if necessary to find alternative accommodation.

15. Future agenda items / matters to note – None.

16. Date of next meeting: 16th February 2021

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9.05pm

CLLR G FAVELL
CHAIRMAN

Minutes approved and signed electronically 16th February 2021 - *G Favell*