

BEXHILL HERITAGE MEMBERS MEETING MINUTES
Thursday 13th April 2023 7pm
At ST BARNABAS CHURCH, SEA ROAD, BEXHILL

Committee attending:

Steve Johnson	(SJ)	Chair/Treasurer
Simon Allen	(SA)	Projects Coordinator
Alexis Markwick	(AM)	IT Support Officer/Historian
Yolanda Laybourne	(YL)	East Parade
Anthony Lightly	(AL)	Chartered Building Surveyor
Lorraine Parkes	(LP)	Minutes Secretary

- 1. APOLOGIES** - Natasha Hamblin (NH), John Swap (JS), David Beales (DB), Vernon Findlay, Michelle Jeffery, Lyn Markwick, Keith Rhodes, Terry Byrne, Lesley Hicken, Paul Lendon, Anne Andersen, Stella Brennan-Wright, Jenny Farrah, Dru Tramasseur
- 2. CHAIR'S WELCOME AND UPDATE:** SJ welcomed members to the meeting.
- 3. APPROVAL OF AND MATTERS ARISING FROM THE NOVEMBER MEMBERS MEETING:** No matters arising. Minutes were approved -Proposed, John Gardner, Seconded, Dave Hatherall.

4. GUEST SPEAKER - JULIE MILLER, TOWN CLERK, BEXHILL TOWN COUNCIL

Within the Rother district most areas are served by Parish and Town Councils and these are collectively known as 'local councils' but Bexhill-on-Sea has not had its very own council since 1974 when the old Bexhill Borough Council was abolished.

Bexhill Town Council (BTC) came into being on 1st April 2021. The foundations for the Council are being laid at the moment. It is early days, and it generally takes five years for a new council to become stable. The Council year runs from May to April. At the first meeting in May, councillors elect a mayor.

The Town Council can only operate as a corporate body, not as individual councillors. Every decision made at a meeting must follow current legislation. Council Officers carry out the actions agreed upon. The Mayor has a casting vote if councillors are tied on a decision. All councillors are unpaid and do not receive expenses. They are not volunteers but elected members and have to abide by a code of conduct. Any complaints regarding Town Councillors goes to Rother District Council (RDC) but there are no sanctions and councillors cannot be removed.

Julie can be given delegated power to make decisions and report back, but this would be for operational decisions only e.g regarding repairs to the council shop. She cannot influence any decisions but can advise on legislation. The only recourse to overturn a decision would be to apply for a judicial review at the High Court.

The only statutory duty that BTC has is for the operation of allotments. There are several allotments in Bexhill and there are currently some vacancies. A Town Council cannot run any other statutory services but can decide which discretionary services they would like to run e.g. public toilets, and parks and open spaces. RDC can only raise Council Tax by a maximum of 2.99% for general council tax, BTC can raise it by any amount. There would be some double-taxation in taking over the public toilets. There was concern expressed about this from residents so the decision has been deferred until after the elections in May.

At every BTC meeting there is a public participation session. Questions should be emailed to Julie who will add them to the agenda, and residents can speak to councillors directly stating their views. RDC has to consult with BTC on any planning applications and it would be useful to have more communication between BH and BTC regarding planning issues. BTC follows the Local Government Transparency Code. Everything is reported on publicly, apart from staff reviews, staff meetings and discussions involving some commercial contracts. The Freedom of Information Act applies to BTC. Please email Julie if you need any further information on this.

Julie's email is town.clerk@bexhilltowncouncil.gov.uk

Questions from members:

Q. How often does BTC meet?

A. At least three times per year. The Full Council Meeting is held monthly on a regular day. The Planning Committee meets bi-monthly and other committees less frequently.

Q. Is BTC responsible for cemeteries?

A. It has responsibility for closed cemeteries only.

Q. Residents were advised that if the BTC was set up it would have access to grants. Have any grants been awarded yet?

A. To apply for a grant successfully, you must have a specific project that is necessary and viable. There must also have been a public consultation. BTC has not been set up long enough to be at this stage. BTC are looking to produce a strategy document that has a project within e.g. a neighbourhood plan. This would need to be led by a consultant at a cost of £10,000. Some small grants can be allocated e.g., £3,000 to the Broad Oak allotments for a compostable toilet.

Q. Can BTC meetings be streamed live to allow greater resident access?

A. This is not possible currently as BTC does not have its own premises. BTC are only a hirer of the Town Hall and RDC will not allow BTC to use their streaming system due to security concerns. BTC also use different venues for meetings. They hope to offer visual streaming in the future but for now it is just an audio stream.

Q. When is the Neighbourhood Plan likely to be ready?

A. The Committee has to agree and it will probably take 2-3 years as it will include new planning policies that affect the whole of Bexhill. The plan will then go to a referendum.

SJ - How can BH support in generating views and collaborating?

A. There is currently a voluntary role for an archivist for BTC, any members are welcome to apply. Bexhill Museum recently supported with cleaning items of regalia which BTC would like to display.

5. REFRESHMENTS and RAFFLE

6. PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT UPDATES - AL

Replacement Windows - David Beales has been working to ensure Rother District Council (RDC) amend their current approach with property owners wishing to replace their existing single glazed traditional wooden framed windows using uPVC heritage design windows in the Conservation Area. The conservation officers at RDC have pursued a policy of seeking to have any replacements manufactured from wood believing this is an appropriate requirement for the preservation of the Conservation Area. RDC has not set policy on this issue and relies on the officers' subjective interpretation of the Local Plan Policies to support this approach.

Officers within RDC proposed that RDC should put in place a Technical Advice Note (TAN) which would provide guidance to the Local Planning Authority on this issue and ensure Members support of the policy. BH was invited to be part of a working party set up by the RDC Oversight and Scrutiny Committee to report on TAN3 (it was one of three TANs being considered). DB and I wrote a detailed report with proposals which was submitted to the O & S Committee. Members on the Working Party agreed unanimously to recommend that the TAN3 NOT be published. This recommendation was accepted by the O&S Committee and passed to Cabinet for endorsement before being set before the Full Council for approval. Therefore, we have been successful in preventing RDC officers from establishing an unreasonable and inappropriate policy on the use of uPVC Heritage windows for replacements in the Conservation Area. Regrettably we have not taken the matter any further forward as we are still back with the officers' interpretation based on the Local Plan. On the positive side, there is no obligation for Councillors to accept any such recommendation. There are, however, some chinks of light on the matter. There have been two refusals that have gone to appeal, and the decision has been overturned. This opens the door to anyone else having a reasonable chance of success on an appeal if their planning application has been refused. We are currently putting together a submission to an appeal on refusal in respect of a property in Devonshire Road. This will be the first that will be considered since the refusal by Councillors to accept TAN3. This will enable us to put the case against TAN3 in front of a Planning Inspector for a decision.

Sainsbury's Murals - BH is currently pursuing Sainsbury's to seek consent from them to clean, repair and restore the three mural panels set in the side elevation of the store facing Town Hall Square. One would think that Sainsbury's would have welcomed the opportunity to have their artwork cleaned and restored for free! We have been trying to obtain this consent for over two years now and we are beginning to make a little progress. We do have a line of communication through Sainsbury's property agent . Although we are not talking directly to anyone in Sainsbury's directly, our contact does seem to have some sympathy for what we are trying to do. At a recent meeting we discussed the need for repairs to the pointing of the brickwork adjacent to the murals which needs to be done before any cleaning etc.. commences. Sainsbury's commissioned someone to undertake pointing repairs. This was not executed properly. Luckily he did very little! I reported back what had happened and we have gone back to Sainsbury's proposing a package to include all pointing works and restoration of the murals. Work would be managed by BH using suitable contractors for the pointing and the remainder by our volunteers. Sainsbury's would pay BH for the pointing work to enable us to settle with the contractor. This proposal has not been ruled out and is being put before Sainsbury's this week. Sadly we are not much further forward than when we first approached the store.

SJ said that the lack of progress is disappointing and BH may need to consider direct action to encourage Sainsbury's to give a positive response. BH could arrange for members to meet outside the Sainsbury's store with placards and ask Bexhill News to highlight the issue.

SJ advised that the **plaques for the bandstand** had been given planning permission and would be erected shortly.

7. BEXHILL HERITAGE FUTURE PROJECTS - SA

BH will be supporting with the renovation of the K6 telephone box in Norman's Bay. It is not visible from the road or beach. The residents are keen to make it into a book exchange. BT had the option of removing the box, but a BH member felt it should be preserved. K6 boxes were commissioned in 1935 to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of King George VI. The first examples were manufactured in 1936. K6 boxes are of cast iron construction and, unusually, have wooden doors. The Normans Bay box is in poor condition with rust all over and some missing glazing. The door doesn't currently shut. SJ is to apply for a grant to support restoration costs. The box will be scaffolded, stripped down to bare metal and then painted with the crest restored to gold paint. SA has sourced a company in Surrey that can supply any original parts needed.

Questions from members:

Q. Could a refurbished box be bought instead?

A. This is being investigated. There is a company that supplies refurbished boxes at a cost of £6,000.

SA is trying to persuade them to swap a refurbished box for the current one to save money.

Q. Will the box be moved to central Bexhill?

A. This was investigated but BT would not agree to a move.

- 8. MEMBER EXCURSIONS** - The "Hidden Secrets of Bexhill" tour is being planned for 2-3 Sundays from mid-June onwards. It seems likely that Bexhill Community Bus will allow use of their vehicles. The Camber Castle tour will need to be postponed for a short while as there are currently nesting birds there.

- 9. QUESTIONS FOR THE COMMITTEE AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS** - Members gave a round of applause for SJ and all the volunteers who had supported with the refurbishment of the bandstand. All agreed that it is a really successful outcome and the opening weekend entertainment was very well received. SJ advised that a similar event will be held on the weekend of the 20th and 21st May. Members should speak to Geoff Tompkins after the meeting for details of other events over the weekend, including a proposed barn dance.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING - THE AGM - THURSDAY 8TH JUNE - 7PM - ST BARNABAS CHURCH

SJ thanked everyone for attending. The meeting closed at 20.50