



BOGNOR REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

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MINUTES AND REPORT OF THE TOWN MEETING OF THE ELECTORS OF BOGNOR REGIS HELD ON MONDAY 11th MARCH 2024

PRESENT (BRTC)

Cllr. F. Oppler - Mayor (in the chair)

Cllr. J. Barrett

Cllr. K. Batley

Cllr. J. Brooks

Cllr. D. Dawes

Cllr. S. Goodheart

Cllr. Miss. C. Needs

Cllr. R. Nash

Cllr. N. Smith

Cllr. M. Stanley

Cllr. Mrs. J. Warr

Cllr. B. Waterhouse

Cllr. P. Wells

Cllr. Mrs. G. Yeates

(Note: Cllrs. Batley, Brooks, Goodheart, Nash, Miss. Needs, Oppler, Stanley, Mrs. Warr and Mrs. Yeates are also Arun District Councillors)

IN ATTENDANCE

Mrs. G. Frost (Town Clerk)

Mrs. J. Davis (Assistant Clerk)

Mrs. R. Vervecken (Civic & Office Manager)

Mr. K. Roberts (Joint Interim CEO and Director of Growth at Arun District Council) (part of meeting)

29 members of the public

COPIES OF DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE FOR THE PUBLIC

Notice and Agenda for the Meeting

Minutes of the Town Meeting of Electors held on 13th March 2023

Audited Accounts to 31st March 2023

Proposed Expenditure for the year 2024-2025

Schedule of Councillors' Attendance at Meetings

The Meeting opened at 7pm

1. WELCOME BY THE MAYOR AND INTRODUCTION OF COUNCILLORS PRESENT

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and attention was drawn to the evacuation procedure in the event of a fire. Councillors present introduced themselves.

Apologies for absence were noted from Cllrs. Ralph and Woodall.

2. **TO APPROVE AND SIGN THE MINUTES OF THE TOWN MEETING OF ELECTORS HELD ON MONDAY 13th MARCH 2023 AND ANY MATTERS ARISING**

The Minutes of the Town Meeting of Electors held on Monday 13th March 2023 were considered, agreed unanimously as a true record and signed by the Mayor as presiding Chair.

3. **TO RECEIVE THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COUNCIL**

The Mayor gave his report (appended to Minutes as **Appendix 1**).

4. **TO RECEIVE THE ACCOUNTS OF THE TOWN COUNCIL YEAR ENDING 31st MARCH 2023 AND BUDGET FOR 2024-2025**

The Town Council's Accounts to year ending 31st March 2023 were duly noted and accepted. The Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee, Cllr. Waterhouse, gave the Chair's report on the budget (appended to Minutes as **Appendix 2**).

5. **TO RECEIVE THE ACCOUNTS OF THE BOGNOR PIER COMPANY LTD. YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023 (IF AVAILABLE)**

The Accounts were duly noted and accepted.

6. **TO CONSIDER RESOLUTIONS OF WHICH WRITTEN NOTICE HAS BEEN GIVEN BY FRIDAY 8th MARCH 2024**

No resolutions had been received.

7. **TO WELCOME THE JOINT INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND DIRECTOR OF GROWTH AT ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL, KARL ROBERTS, TO GIVE A PRESENTATION AND UPDATE ON THE ALEXANDRA THEATRE PROJECT**

The Chair welcomed Mr. Roberts to the meeting, who began his presentation with a brief overview of the current financial position of Arun District Council (ADC).

He explained that local governments nationally are experiencing 'hard times', with around a 40% reduction of support from central government received over the last twelve years or so. He admitted that ADC had therefore, like many others, been experiencing some financial challenges.

With reserves likely to dwindle if money is not saved in certain areas, he referenced ADC's 'future action plan', which is intended to try to 'close the financial gap' of around £5 million per year, so the District Council are not relying on their reserves. As part of this action, ADC will be looking into the services they currently provide, to ensure they are being as efficient as possible, with an electoral review, looking at how many Councillors may be required to serve the district in the future, an aspect to be considered, most likely following the 2027 ADC elections. An asset review will also be undertaken

to help to ascertain if enough income is being garnered from the relatively little land ADC own, in comparison to other local authorities of its size. This will likely include a review of office space used by ADC employees, including Bognor Regis Town Hall, which currently has only around a 10% occupation of ADC staff.

Alexandra Theatre Update

With £13 million invested in the Alexandra Theatre improvements, under the Levelling-Up Fund, Mr. Roberts reported that planning permission for this project had been granted. Although the overall auditorium footprint would remain similar, a new exterior will be built, with more studio space, and a new café and reception area amongst the changes to be undertaken as part of this exciting opportunity. He reported that ADC were looking at the feasibility of securing more funds to enable an expansion of the current proposals, with solar panels to save on energy costs being a potential option, should more funding be obtained.

Neilcott Construction had been appointed as the contractors for the project, with work aiming to be underway in May 2024, which was later than ADC had hoped. This had been partly due to contractual difficulties.

Brewers Fayre Site

Acquired from Whitbread PLC, ADC had been presented with various opportunities to consider in relation to the future use of the previous Brewers Fayre site, with one of those being the possible reestablishment of the 'Royal Hall'. To aid in choosing the best option for the Town, a report had been commissioned with outcomes of the report going to the ADC Economy Committee at their meeting to be held on 16th April 2024.

The Arcade

With scaffolding having been up at The Arcade for some time, and the Town Council having written to ADC regarding the current state of The Arcade, following agreement to do so at the Council Meeting held on 4th March 2024 (Min. 181 refers), Mr. Roberts informed Members and public present that a lot of issues had been found within the buildings, particularly to the western side, which is why works were taking so long. He advised that they were looking at temporary fixes to try to alleviate some of the problems in a timelier manner. He stated that the District Council were pleased to have occupants in the ground floor buildings, but that the upper floors remained in poor condition, which had been exacerbated by volatile weather.

ADC have obtained a £600,000 grant from the government to strip the asbestos from the buildings and convert into 35 residential units. Plans also include the replacing of the single storey building to the rear.

Bognor Regis Masterplan

Twenty years have passed since the Masterplan for Bognor Regis was produced. Whilst some projects had moved forward, others needed to be refreshed and revisited. Mr. Roberts reported that public consultations, to decide on the area's most important to be included within the Masterplan, will hopefully begin over the course of 2024, with the area looked at likely to be wider than the previous version.

The Mayor thanked Mr. Roberts for his presentation and a Q&A session was

offered by the Joint Interim CEO, with questions being put forward by members of the public present.

Questions regarding the Alexandra Theatre project timeline were asked, with Mr. Roberts advising that it was expected to take 18 months, now that a new contractor was in place and with work hoping to begin in May 2024. ADC are looking to publish fortnightly progress updates about the development on their website, to keep members of the public informed.

With the Premier Inn Hotel also commencing building work soon, Mr. Roberts confirmed that although he wasn't certain of the timeline, he hoped both projects would be done at once, to allow minimal disruption within the area.

Some residents asked about the current situation with the unoccupied Brewers Fayre building, concurring that it was a shame to keep it empty for so long when it was possible that local businesses would be happy to take up premises here in the short term. Mr. Roberts advised those present that the occupation of the building was not his decision, and that the findings of the report, as detailed earlier in the meeting, will be considered by the ADC Economy Committee. Acknowledging the presence of dual-hatted Councillors at the Electors Meeting, Mr. Roberts encouraged them to take onboard the comments made and bring them to the attention of the Economy Committee. Mr. Roberts stated that looking at short-term solutions at the site would be quite challenging without having to first make some fundamental changes to the building itself.

Also, in reference to the Brewers Fayre building, a resident commented that the current signage on the building was very out of date. Mr. Roberts explained that ADC preferred providing relevant updates on their website, which reaches a far wider audience than local signage. He did however advise that he would ask the current project manager to investigate getting a noticeboard installed here, to ensure passers-by are also updated with any project information.

Following a comment made about the disappointing lack of lighting on Place St Maur, Mr. Roberts offered to take the contact details for the member of the public who he would respond to once he had made enquiries as to why lights hadn't been included in the scheme in the first place. A Councillor present suggested lighting could be fed into the Alexandra Theatre project, to improve lighting in the vicinity.

A member of the public introduced themselves as a representative for the applicant seeking planning permission for a site situated in Waterloo Square. They complained about the length of time that negotiations with ADC, as the Local Planning Authority, had taken. In their opinion, the site had been an eyesore for 8 years and this sentiment was shared by the Mayor who stated, as a dual-hatted Councillor, that ADC Councillors were keen to move things forward. Mr. Roberts responded by saying that he would ask whether there were any outstanding communications with the applicant to be answered. Whilst he would not discuss commercially sensitive matters in a public meeting, Mr. Roberts said that there was a shared ambition to see something done at the site.

Lastly, a member seated in the public gallery asked when an access ramp

would be installed to allow wheelchair users to access the sea. Mr. Roberts stated that he was not involved in this project, and he was therefore not able to comment on any timescale. He asked the member of the public for their contact details and advised that another staff member, more equipped to give answers, would be in touch.

The Mayor and Councillors present thanked Mr. Roberts for his time.

Karl Roberts left the Meeting at 7.55pm

8. BOGNOR REGIS TOWN COUNCIL'S PROGRAMME OF EVENTS FOR THE YEAR

The Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee, Cllr. Waterhouse gave a brief report on some of the upcoming events planned for 2024, including the Town Crier Competition, 80th Anniversary D-Day commemorations and free activities on offer throughout the summer months. He advised that the full programme of events, containing further details, was available on the Town Council's website and Facebook pages.

A Councillor expressed disappointment that only Town Council organised events were listed within the events programme, citing this as a missed opportunity for promotion of other events organised by outside bodies. Cllr. Waterhouse agreed with the sentiments expressed, with the Town Clerk confirming that this was due to be discussed at the next Environmental and Leisure Committee Meeting on 18th March 2024.

9. OPEN FORUM WITH QUESTIONS TO COUNCILLORS/ATTENDEES

The Mayor invited members of the public to put any questions to the Council. He emphasised the need for questions to be in relation to items under the remit of the Town Council, and not those needing to be addressed by Arun District or West Sussex County Councils. To clarify further for those in attendance, the Mayor explained briefly, what came under the jurisdiction of Bognor Regis Town Council.

The first question was in relation to the foreshore, with a member of the public suggesting that a community group could be established to clear the foreshore of shingle on a regular basis, if there were funding streams available for this. Whilst it was noted that ADC should be contacted for beach/seafront matters, the Mayor confirmed that funding could be applied for, such as Grant Aid, if it met the agreed criteria.

A resident asked Councillors if there was extra money to go toward street sweeping and litter collection. It was confirmed that ADC's cleansing contract with Biffa was up for renewal and more emphasis should be placed on those who drop litter in the first place. The Mayor praised Biffa, who do a 'great job' with their resources. Other Councillors acknowledged that the Town would be a less appealing place, without them regularly litter picking.

Regarding any issues with ADC, a member of the public asked if there was a process by which the Town Council could exert pressure on the District Council to take responsibility for the upkeep of areas within their remit. The

Mayor advised that at the most recent Town Council Meeting, two letters were written to ADC, pushing for them to address issues that the Town Council felt not enough was being done about. He advised that should the member of the public have anything specific in mind, they should write to the Town Clerk, for possible inclusion on an agenda for a future meeting.

Concern was raised regarding the ever-growing population of pigeons blighting the Town Centre. A resident asked whether signs could be erected, asking people not to feed them. Some Councillors advised that they had spoken to various food outlets within the area, with many confirming they were 'not worried' about the problem, as it was not affecting footfall. Regarding signage, Members concurred that unfortunately, they did not feel this would be possible nor have any effect on those feeding the pigeons.

Speeding traffic, particularly in Victoria Drive and Argyle Road was a main talking point, with residents urging the Town Council to put pressure on WSCC as the relevant authority. Councillors assured worried residents that this is being pursued, stating that the main problem was enforcement due to a lack of police resources. A Councillor added that with most road users knowing where speed cameras were situated, they simply slowed down for the cameras and sped back up once they were clear from view. As a deterrent to this behavior, he felt the cameras should be moved around on a regular basis and further advised of a volunteer service being backed by WSCC, seeking to train volunteers to use speed guns to monitor speeding issues in their own streets. Letters would be sent in the first instance, to deter offenders from speeding again, with any persistent culprits eventually having to appear in court. Various speeding signs and their effectiveness were also discussed.

Proposed improvements to the Esplanade, including the narrowing of the road and the changing of speed limits to 20mph, between Lennox Street and Clarence Road, were also discussed. Residents were interested to hear that different crossings were part of the proposals, with a walkway parallel to the Promenade also being planned. Although the proposals included the loss of 19 parking spaces, Members expressed their hope that with the other traffic calming measures being considered, the traffic along the seafront may be slowed.

The final comment coming from the public gallery was in relation to regeneration in Bognor Regis, which the member of the public felt had been slow to progress in the past year. Councillors present shared the frustration expressed, agreeing that Bognor Regis had been promised so much but had been delivered so little, particularly in comparison to Littlehampton. With the earlier report from Mr. Roberts speaking of the need to review the Bognor Regis Masterplan, those present hoped that this would be an opportunity for real collaborative working with ADC, in putting forward key sites and projects needed to push the Town forward.

With no other questions being put forward, the Mayor thanked all those present for attending.

The Meeting closed at 8.43pm

Good evening and welcome everyone to Bognor Regis Town Council's Annual Town Meeting of Electors for 2024. Thank you very much for joining us here tonight.

As the name suggests, this Meeting is for you, our Electorate, to steer the conversation, through the topics and questions important to you and your Town, and as your elected Town Councillors, we will do our best to provide answers where possible.

The past twelve months has been another challenging one with the cost-of-living crisis continuing to cause much struggle for people, through the rises in food, energy costs, fuel and mortgage rates, to name just a few.

As your Town Council, we have done our best to reflect these challenges through the setting of our budget for the 2024-2025 financial year, of which you will hear more about, slightly later in the meeting.

As a result of these hardships, our fantastic local charities and organisations, have gone above and beyond to cater for the further demand on their already stretched services, and we thank each and every one of them for their tireless efforts in easing the burden for Bognor Regis residents.

It has been wonderful to have served this Town I call 'home', as your Mayor once again, following an extended break from the Town Council. The teamwork and desire to work for a better and brighter future for Bognor Regis, has been more evident than ever since the May 2023 elections, and I'm very proud to be a part of that.

In my role as Mayor and 'First Citizen' of the Town, I've been lucky enough to attend a wide range of events and engagements.

Some highlights that particularly stand out are Proms in the Park, which was one of my first events attended as Mayor alongside our lovely Bognor Regis Town Crier, the Drive through Time Motor Gala was a feast for the eyes and a must-attend for car enthusiasts and Formula One fans! Both organised by the Town Council, they certainly kick-started the summer season of events here in Bognor Regis. In July I attended the poignant commemorations for Armed Forces Day and latterly, Remembrance Sunday.

I really enjoyed the Town's first Punch and Judy Festival, held in September, marking the 60th Anniversary of the making of the film 'The Punch and Judy Man', filmed in our Town, and the Christmas Lights Switch-On in the Town Centre was a tremendous success with a record number of people enjoying the festivities on offer, building up to the 'Big Switch at 6' itself!

Over the past nearly 12 months, I've been honoured to attend premises openings – celebrating the arrival of new business ventures to Bognor Regis, as well as charity fetes, concerts and school visits, to name a few, and of course, it was an honour to form part of the official line-up to welcome HRH The Duke Of Gloucester to the Bognor Regis Museum, just before Christmas. My sincere thanks to everyone who has invited me to join them, at their event this year.

The continued support of our Town's youth provision has remained at the forefront over the past twelve months, with numerous cheque presentations made to youth groups, to ensure young people in and around our Town are catered for, through dedicated support as well as activities and entertainment. Having visited several youth groups myself over the past few months, including the 39 Youth Club, Bognor Regis Youth and Community Centre and Bognorphenia, it certainly looks as though funding provided through the Town Council's 'Youth and Young Persons' budget, has been gratefully received, and is being put to good use. Applications for the next round of funding will be going live in due course.

Later this month, the Town Council will host its Civic Reception, at which I will be presenting cheques to successful applicants of the 2024 Grant Aid scheme, as well as giving out awards for my 'Mayor's Good Citizen' and the 'Citizens Award for Young People'. In addition, I will also be raising money for my chosen charity for the year, the West Sussex Wildlife Trust, through the provision of a raffle, which I hope will be well-supported.

On a personal note, I'd like to thank my fellow Town Councillors, including the Deputy Mayor, and Town Council staff, for their support this year and everyone who has invited me to attend an engagement, they have all been extremely insightful, enjoyable and an honour to have been a part of.

Thank you once again for coming here this evening, to be a part of this meeting. I know I speak on behalf of us all when I say we look forward to hearing your valuable contributions throughout.

Dear Resident

It's been another difficult year for most of us with the problems people face induced by the cost-of-living crisis.

The Town Council has concentrated on relieving the pressure on its residents as far as possible, on elements that are within its control, by fixing its precept at the same level as last year whilst attempting to maintain our contributions to the services and events that are important to the residents of Bognor Regis.

In addition to the services and events run by the Town Council and by outside bodies, it is pleasing that Arun District Council are continuing to run the 2-hour Free Parking Scheme which plays such an important part in the commercial life of Bognor Regis. The Business Warden Scheme, supported by the Town Council, improves the Town Centre experience for many residents and visitors alike and we are pleased to maintain this for the next financial year. The Town Council representatives and staff continue to receive feedback praising the work of Town Force in removing rubbish and graffiti thus improving the look and feel of our Town. Town Force also play a vital part in preparing for and safeguarding events held in Bognor Regis.

We will continue to support our young people, delivering funding to local youth work organisations as well as planning once again to offer a variety of free entertainment during the summer months both by running our own events and supporting outside bodies to run events by providing financial contributions.

The ceremonial turning on of the Christmas Lights, by the Mayor in the Town Centre attended by many residents, once again illustrates the power of working together with local businesses as well as the wider community, and the Town Council was proud to continue to play their part by supplying the Christmas Lights, which were warmly received and will be back again this year.

Details on the budget can be found on the Town Council website: www.bognorregis.gov.uk.