



# BOGNOR REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

TOWN CLERK, Glenna Frost, The Town Hall, Clarence  
Road, Bognor Regis, West Sussex, PO21 1LD  
Telephone: 01243 867744  
E-mail: [bognortc@bognorregis.gov.uk](mailto:bognortc@bognorregis.gov.uk)

## MINUTES AND REPORT OF THE TOWN MEETING OF THE ELECTORS OF BOGNOR REGIS HELD ON MONDAY 17<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2025

### PRESENT (BRTC)

Cllr. Miss. C. Needs - Mayor (in the chair)  
Cllr. J. Barrett  
Cllr. D. Dawes  
Cllr. S. Goodheart  
Cllr. F. Oppler  
Cllr. N. Smith  
Cllr. Mrs. J. Warr  
Cllr. B. Waterhouse  
Cllr. P. Wells  
Cllr. Mrs. G. Yeates  
(Note: Cllrs. Goodheart, Miss. Needs, Oppler, Mrs. Warr and Mrs. Yeates are also Arun District Councillors)

### IN ATTENDANCE

Mrs. G. Frost (Town Clerk)  
Mrs. J. Davis (Deputy Clerk)  
Mrs. R. Vervecken (Civic & Office Manager)  
Mrs. D. Hudd (CEO of Arun District Council) (part of meeting)  
9 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 11<sup>th</sup> March 2024  
Audited Accounts to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024  
Proposed Expenditure for the year 2025-2026  
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. Batley and Woodall. No apologies were received from Cllrs. Nash, Ralph or Stanley.

2. **TO APPROVE AND SIGN THE MINUTES OF THE TOWN MEETING OF ELECTORS HELD ON MONDAY 11<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2024 AND ANY MATTERS ARISING**

A Councillor referred to queries raised at last year's Annual Town Meeting of Electors, with Mr. Karl Roberts (Director of Growth at ADC), including planning permission relating to a site in Waterloo Square. The Councillor took the opportunity to ask Mrs. Dawn Hudd (Chief Executive Officer of ADC), whether there were any updates regarding the site and proposed improvements. Mrs. Hudd confirmed that negotiations with leaseholders were ongoing and advised that a report would shortly be presented to the District Council's Economy Committee, which would provide further detail.

The Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting of Electors held on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> March 2024 were considered and agreed as a true record and signed by the Mayor as presiding Chair.

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

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

4. **TO RECEIVE THE ACCOUNTS OF THE TOWN COUNCIL YEAR ENDING 31<sup>st</sup> MARCH 2024 AND BUDGET FOR 2025-2026**

The Town Council's Accounts to year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 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 31<sup>st</sup> DECEMBER 2024 (IF AVAILABLE)**

The Accounts were duly noted and accepted.

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

The following **Resolution** had been received:

6.1 ***This Annual Meeting of Electors***

***Recognises that major changes are going to effect the future of local government in West Sussex; Calls on Arun District Council to undertake a Reparishing Review to help ensure that future parish-level local government in the District is best able to take full advantage of forthcoming major changes, including working with a new Combined Mayoral Authority and also ensuring the maximum democratic accountability in terms of voted-for parish Councillors throughout this local area.***

**Proposed** Mr. Cosgrove **Seconded** Cllr. Goodheart.

Mr. Cosgrove spoke to his Motion. He outlined that the forthcoming changes to local government would represent the most significant restructuring in the sector since the formation of Arun District Council in 1974. Mr. Cosgrove cited statistics relating to local parishes within West Sussex, noting that the number of uncontested elections had increased in recent years. He expressed the view that, under a larger unitary authority, it was unlikely that many local parish Councillors would be elected. He therefore sought assurance from Arun District Council that it would work to ensure local parish councils were capable of managing the additional services they would almost certainly be required to deliver, following the abolition of district councils and the establishment of unitary authorities.

Several Members spoke in support of the sentiments expressed by Mr. Cosgrove regarding the forthcoming changes to the structure and operation of local government. However, differing views were expressed in relation to his request for Arun District Council to undertake a re-parishing review. Many emphasised the importance of ensuring that any such discussions were conducted collaboratively with neighbouring parishes, rather than in a prescriptive manner, as a more directive approach could risk damaging future working relationships.

Some stated there were 'more questions than answers' at this stage, in relation to the devolution process. Historically, Bognor Regis Town Council had not always been well-regarded with its surrounding parish council's, with the 'One Bognor' initiative singled out as perhaps one of a few contributing factors. A dual-hatted Councillor, who was also the Chair of the ADC Corporate Support Committee, advised that the process of boundary reviews had been started, but the rapid speed at which devolution had been introduced had put an end to discussions, due to the considerable extra officer time and resource this would take.

Mrs. Hudd agreed that guidance produced to date on the future role of town and parish councils had been 'very light', suggesting the Motion raised by Mr. Cosgrove may have come too early, with the district council simply not having the capacity to take on a re-parishing review, at this time.

Mr. Cosgrove in his closing words for this Motion, clarified that the requests put forward were not for immediate action, and were more intended to 'alert' those present, including the district council, that forward planning was essential to ensure Bognor Regis was not left behind. In relation to the position of parish councils that 'regularly' experienced uncontested elections, he stated the importance of their processes needing to be reviewed, with the potential introduction of minimum standards.

A vote was taken on all aspects of the Motion, and the result was 2 in favour, 2 against and 1 abstention. Accordingly, the Resolution was **LOST**.

**7. TO WELCOME THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL, DAWN HUDD, TO GIVE A PRESENTATION AND TO PROVIDE AN UPDATE ON DEVOLUTION**

Mrs. Hudd took the opportunity to thank the Town Council for inviting her to attend. During her eight months in the role of CEO at ADC, Mrs. Hudd enthusiastically told how she had enjoyed meeting local groups and businesses, enabling her to gain a good understanding of Bognor Regis.

She began by explaining the distinguishing factors between devolution and local government reorganisation, which were two separate ideas, but intrinsically linked. The 'White Paper' most recently published, explained how power would be transferred out of Westminster and into the hands of mayoral combined authorities across the country, with Sussex meeting the requirements to qualify, due to its population of 1.7 million. Using a presentation, Mrs. Hudd explained how central government had set out a clear framework for implementation. Eventually, a Mayor would be elected to serve, with powers to make decisions for the authority for which they had been elected and a team to be appointed to form a clear mandate. The timetable of the process was reported along with notification of the ADC consultation, which would be open to all. Mrs. Hudd described the pace as 'head spinning', confirming she is working closely with the WSCC Chief Executive to make sure the local area is protected and ready. The county council submitted their proposal for the mayoral combined authority, with Mrs. Hudd conceding that the district council had very little input in this. Out of eighteen areas that submitted themselves for the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP), only six were approved, including Sussex and Brighton.

In her experience, Mrs. Hudd shared that it was 'easier to get things done' in a unitary authority, having previously had a role within one. Brighton and Hove had been 'pushed' for their preferences for the formation, as they were too small to qualify by themselves, with Mrs. Hudd confirming that this could affect proposals for this area. A letter was being sent to Brighton and Hove City Council explaining the work done in the West Sussex area, along with data collected. She further advised that in September 2025, a full business case on the preferred unitary model needed to be submitted, with any competing proposals being decided upon by the relevant Minister. She emphasised that the proposal would ensure that the needs of the community were at the forefront for the future.

She confirmed that unitary authorities would deliver all the services district and county councils currently provided and offered assurance that all staff currently employed by both, would be offered positions within the new council structure. Whilst the roles of town and parish councils would be very important, little was currently known about any specifics, with just two mentions made of the more local levels of government in the recently released White Papers.

Mrs. Hudd advised that despite impending changes and abolishment of ADC, they are not looking to split services such as leisure for the time being, as contracts are still in place for these provisions, that need to be adhered to. The district council have an 'obligation' to ensure the area is in a strong position to move forward, including the preservation of community facilities.

As such, a Community Asset Framework had recently been developed, involving policies for transferring council-owned land/buildings to community groups, recognising Assets of Community Value under the Community Right to Bid, and utilising an Arun Community Asset Fund for small projects.

Following her presentation, Mrs. Hudd invited questions and comments from those present.

One dual-hatted Councillor raised concerns with the idea that 'all' current ADC and WSCC staff would be assured jobs within the new authority, citing there would be many duplicate candidates for the same roles. This would be particularly problematic with the government's aim of saving money within the restructuring. He deemed it 'appalling' that there would be at least another two years before another election and 'fanciful' that the government believed the local government reorganisation would be ready for 2027. Lastly, he expressed deep concern for the future of the local area, should Sussex eventually be linked with Brighton and Hove under one unitary authority.

In response, Mrs. Hudd confirmed that to date, Brighton and Hove had shown 'no interest' in joining Sussex. Regarding staff retaining their jobs, she informed that the new unitary authority would not be in operation until 'year one', meaning everyone would be carrying on with their current positions before the program comes together, which will be a phased process. She admitted that aligning terms and conditions of employment for staff would be a 'huge amount of work, but that this would be done as a priority, with many case studies for success (and potential pitfalls) to model. Using these as examples, she explained how there is often a low level of redundancy seen, with some staff choosing to leave, taking the opportunity to retire etc.

Another Member asked whether local government reorganisation would have the impact of politicising the lowest tier of government (ie. town and parish councils). Mrs. Hudd hoped this wouldn't be the case, stating her opinion that the focus should remain on how to best serve the local communities (i.e. Bognor Regis).

Regarding how the mayoral authority will operate during its first year, with district and borough Councils still in operation, before 'phase two' is implemented, a Councillor asked for Mrs. Hudd's opinion on how it is envisioned this would work?

It was confirmed that representatives from each of the councils would form part of a board, to ensure smooth running and eventually transition. During this first phase, it is anticipated that the operation will be mainly strategic.

Concern was raised as to whether larger areas (such as Brighton and Hove and Crawley) would attract more financial investment from an elected Mayor, with towns such as Bognor Regis left behind. With the current government looking to improve 'deprived' areas, a Councillor expressed his hope that the new Mayor will share the same vision and drive to continue with this work, to ensure equal opportunity for growth, regardless of size.

With other questions on existing debts, NHS geographies and other services raised, Mrs. Hudd confirmed that there would be a dedicated page going live on ADC's website, with links to further information on how it is envisaged services will operate under any new plans.

## **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 free events planned for 2025, which he stated were all available to view on the Town Council's website.

## **9. OPEN FORUM WITH QUESTIONS TO COUNCILLORS/ATTENDEES**

The Mayor invited members of the public to put any relevant questions to the Council.

The first comment was in relation to the Town's Christmas lights. Whilst positive on the impact of the lighting display, a resident asked whether anything could be done during daytime hours, for those who may not visit the Town Centre in the evening, to be able to enjoy the lights? The Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee advised this would be investigated.

A meeting was requested with ADC to engage with business owners in the Arcade, to allow for open communication and transparency on future development plans here. This was of particular concern to businesses, who were facing many challenges, with ongoing building work nearby also affecting their footfall. Mrs. Hudd advised that the Director of Growth and Leader of the Council were in the process of arranging such a meeting, and that businesses would be contacted in due course. An 'action tracker' was previously set up with the Director of Growth, to ensure that all requests of this nature were designated to one contact. The Deputy Clerk will email Mr. Roberts to chase up any outstanding actions.

Another topic of conversation was the ongoing issue of beach access, with a member of the public querying why no progress had seemingly been made. A Councillor expressed sympathy that, while the matter was acknowledged as important, following the Town Council's most recent elections two years ago, Members had considered the Working Party to be unproductive. This was primarily due to the lack of action from ADC, without whose involvement the matter could not progress. The resident recalled how the engineer who had been involved in discussions on beach access had unfortunately left ADC, after which the Working Party disbanded. He stated he would liaise with the relevant individuals to see if there were any plans to progress with this, citing it as one of the legacies of the late Cllr. Brooks. Another Councillor further elaborated that the BRTC vision had recently been renewed and that the issue of beach access has been included within this.

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

***The Meeting closed at 8.52pm***

Good evening and welcome to Bognor Regis Town Council's Annual Town Meeting of Electors for 2025.

Tonight is all about you, our Electorate. This is your chance to steer the conversation in any way you see fit, raising topics and asking questions about things important to you and your Town. Your elected Town Councillors here tonight, will do their best to provide answers where possible.

You will shortly hear from the CEO of Arun District Council, Dawn Hudd, who will be providing an update on, and take questions regarding, the current hot topic of local government devolution, and what this means for us in Bognor Regis. Being as informed as possible in these early stages is particularly important given the recent announcement from the government that Sussex and Brighton will be part of the Devolution Priority Programme, with a consultation on proposals for a mayoral authority in the area now live. We very much appreciate Dawn agreeing to be here tonight to talk to us all about this, and whilst I'm sure she will admit she does not have all the answers, hopefully we can learn a little more about the local government reform throughout this evening.

It has been an honour to have served as Mayor and I am so proud of all we are achieving as a Town, including the many developments which are well underway. I can assure you that your Town Councillors are fully committed to ensuring Bognor Regis continues to be a thriving Town, for us all.

We have, as always, given careful consideration of the continued economic pressures on local people, when setting the budget for this coming year, and I'm pleased to say that the Chair of our Policy and Resources Committee, Cllr. Bob Waterhouse will provide further information about the budget for the coming year, later in the meeting.

This year really has been wonderful, and I have enjoyed every minute of it. From my earliest engagements such as the Bognor Regis Carnival, reopening of the 39 Club, the Bognor Regis Armed Forces Day and the Town Council's popular Drive through Time Motor Gala, my year in office got off to a flying start.

Although it is impossible to choose, and every engagement has been enjoyable, a few that stand out to me personally are the poignant celebrations we held on 6<sup>th</sup> June for the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day, the Remembrance Sunday Service which was brilliantly supported by our residents, the Bognor Regis Town Crier Competition which was an amazing spectacle and certainly a roaring success and the Twinning Reception we enjoyed during the summer, where the Town Council welcomed visitors from our German twinned towns, to end their weeklong visit to Bognor Regis. It's been an honour to attend many of these events alongside our Town Crier, Jane Smith, who has also acted as my Consort through my Mayoral year, and I must also pay a special thank you to the Deputy Mayor, Cllr. Mrs. Gill Yeates, who has been such a support to me in the role.

I'd like to also thank my fellow Town Councillors and Town Council staff, for making this past year as enjoyable as it could have possibly been, and of course, thank you to everyone who has been kind enough to have invited

me to their engagement. They have all been so enjoyable and it's been brilliant to have met people from every corner of our community, who care so much about what they do and making Bognor Regis an even better place to live.

On a sombre note, we were very sad to hear of the passing of serving Bognor Regis Town Councillor, Jim Brooks, in January. Jim was a passionate and kind man, always advocating for his beloved Bognor Regis, the people within it and the projects he so believed in. He will be sorely missed within the Town Council and I'm certain his absence will continue to be felt throughout the Town. We, of course, pass on our condolences to his loved ones.

Before we formally begin tonight's proceedings, I'd like to end with my final thank you, which goes to each of you for attending, to be a part of the Annual Town Meeting of Electors. We are looking forward to hearing from you all.

Dear Resident

The general economic environment continues to be difficult for many people, with the cost-of-living crisis continuing to impact. With this situation the Town Council has had to come to the difficult conclusion that in order to maintain the services and run the events that are important to the residents of Bognor Regis, it will be necessary to increase the precept by 2.5%. This amounts to an additional charge of £3.40 a year for a band D property.

The Town Council is planning to run a full programme of events, building on the successes from last year including the very popular ceremonial switching on of the Christmas Lights.

In order to continue to support our young people, the Town Council has increased its funding to local youth work organisations and is 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.

Details of the budget can be found on the Town Council website:

[www. bognorregis.gov.uk](http://www.bognorregis.gov.uk)