

Chair's Report

Bexhill Town Forum

18 November 2016

I would like to thank the executive committee for electing me to be Chair of the Town Forum for 2016 – 2017. I have made no secret of the fact that I believe that the Town Forum is a steppingstone to establishing a Bexhill Town Council. However, I pledge that I will chair the Town Forum impartially and fairly. More importantly I want to ensure that it acts as an effective voice for the people of Bexhill: debating the issues that matter to the people of the town; and where appropriate acting as a catalyst for change.

Since my election, the committee have agreed to make some changes to the way the forum is run and organised:

- To introduce a constitution for the forum using the established 'guide to the forum' as a starting point.
- Publishing minutes of executive and forum meetings on line as soon as possible after the meetings so that members can see what is being discussed. I want Bexhill Town Forum to be open and transparent in the way that it conducts its business.
- Involving members in deciding what issues need to be debated and actioned.
- Making sure our meetings are accessible to all. First of all we want to ensure that the meetings rotate around the community and secondly we want to experiment with holding meetings during the day and on Saturdays.

NOTICES

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

Rother District Council is launching the Community Governance Review that will run throughout 2017. Rother have set up the review after nearly 4000 residents signed a petition calling on the Council to conduct a review into the way Bexhill is governed.

The review will be in two parts with an initial consultation from January to March 2017 to seek ideas or proposals from the public about how they want the town to be run. Those ideas will be considered by Rother councillors who will vote on which proposals to put forward to a second consultation with residents later in the year.

Bexhill Town Forum executive committee have already agreed with Rother that they will present at our February 2017 meeting. However in the meantime, we are urging residents to get involved and register with Rother to receive information and updates. The address is <http://www.surveysurvey.net/?BCGregister>

PLANNING CONSULTATION - DEVELOPMENT & SITE ALLOCATIONS LOCAL PLAN

In December 2016 Rother District Council will be undertaking a 10 week consultation on the Local Plan Part 2. The Development and Site Allocations (DaSA) Local Plan identifies the preferred sites needed to meet the Core Strategy development targets.

The DaSA is being presented in the form of an '**Options and Preferred Options**' version to enable local residents, business and other stakeholders the opportunity to comment on the important choices that are being made before a final Plan is put forward.

The DaSA consists of **three** parts. **Part A** - the overall context for the new Plan. **Part B** - This covers district wide policies around, Resource Management, Communities, Housing, Economy, Environment and Implementation. **Part C** - Site Allocations identifies the outstanding housing requirements for every town and village where further allocations are required, as at **1 April 2016**

Bexhill has the most proposals. These include reaffirmation of the 2006 Local Plan allocations for housing and business to the north of Sidley, a preferred option of some 450 dwellings to the north-west of the town, and several other housing sites around the town. Options (but not a preferred option) are put forward for the future of the now unused Northey Training Camp.

Attention is given to the town centre, with updated boundaries for the town centre and primary shopping area. Also, an area centred on the De La Warr Pavilion and extending along the seafront to the Museum is identified as a 'Cultural Centre'.

The consultation is expected to straddle the **Christmas period, there will be a period of 10 weeks** starting from mid-December 2016 through to mid-February.

Public engagement will be encouraged both online and through the press, as well as by direct notification to a wide range of consultation bodies.

ROTHER CITIZENS PANEL AND WHO CAN JOIN?

The Panel are local residents who volunteer to take part in consultations and customer research. The members tell the Council a bit about themselves and give permission to the Council to contact them. The Council tells the Panel members what people have said in the consultations.

If you would like to join Rother Citizens Panel, you must live in the Rother district in East Sussex. You cannot be an elected member of Rother District Council. There are no other rules. You can join the conversation on Twitter **@rdconsult**

To apply please use this link to the registration form:

<http://www.surveysserver.net/?registration> or email citizenspanel@rother.gov.uk

Alternatively you can phone Joanne Wright on 01424 787816 to receive a regular newsletter by post.

UPDATE FROM HUW MERRIMAN MP

I invited Huw Merriman MP to provide an update on the continuing disruption to rail services operating to and from Bexhill on sea. He has sent the following response to share with the Forum.

"Thanks again for the invite and I am sorry that I cannot join. I have a pre-existing invite to attend an event at Bodiam. I always enjoy taking part in the Forum and want to wish you

well with your new chairmanship. It is good that the Forum is on hand to channel community engagement.

In terms of Southern, we are still facing difficulties from industrial action. I am keen to ensure that we have second members of crew on our trains. The role of conductor has been changed to that of onboard supervisor so that the crew member can spend more time with passengers and less time closing doors. The doors will now be closed by drivers on lines where new rolling stock is being introduced. The RMT union is striking because, whilst they accept that they have guarantees over jobs and pay, they do not want any train to run unless it has a second member onboard. In my view, if a train can run, but the second member of staff is not able to join it, then it would be better and safer to get people home on that train in this exceptional circumstance rather than cancel it. The unions do not agree and believe it would be unsafe. If this were the case, why has the safety regulator signed off on it and why are the unions not on strike on the 40% of Rail routes where this practice has been adopted for years without safety incident? Whilst the RMT members have now agreed to transition to the new role of onboard supervisor, it appears that the train drivers may now strike and refuse to open the doors.

As your MP, I sit on the Transport Select Committee and have ensured that Government Ministers, Southern management and Union leaders have all appeared before us in order for us to get to hold to account and press for action. I can assure you that all MPs covering Southern have had enough and some strong representations have been made to Government for passenger compensation. We are all worried for our businesses and the ability of our constituents to get to work and study. People are having to give up their jobs due to this issue. It is a sad irony that this arising from action by only 400 second members of staff who have been guaranteed a job.

I do hope I can bring better news but fear that a strike with drivers will set us back further. I am, with Amber Rudd, meeting with the Rail Minister soon to discuss the High Speed 1 extension from Ashford to Bexhill. The Forum may be forgiven for wondering why I am not focussing merely on delivering a poor Southern service to normal but, in my view, if we could move this service away from Southern and on to Southeastern then we stand a strong chance of getting a better performer in and on a fast speed network. I will thus keep fighting to give you the rail service you all deserve. The situation is a disgrace and it makes me determined to do all I can to change it".

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