

Burgess Hill Town Council

MINUTES of the proceedings of the
BURGESS HILL ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
held on **MONDAY 11 APRIL 2022** at 19.00 hours
at Cyprus Hall, Cyprus Road.

Those present included the Town Mayor Anne Eves, Town Councillors and approximately 50 members of the public.

1. **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Town Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introduced the panel members, Councillor Robert Eggleston, Councillor Joseph Foster and CEO Steve Cridland. The Town Mayor also welcomed local MP Mims Davis and the newly elected Councillor of Dunstall Ward, Mustak Miah.

2. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from David Farmer, Mary Smith, Tony Aston, Jane Aston, Trevor Leggo. Brian Kilkelly, Councillor Andrew Barrett-Miles and Councillor Tofojjul Hussein.

3. **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Tuesday 27 July 2021, having been previously circulated, were signed by the Town Mayor with the agreement of those present.

4. **REPORT ON THE WORK AND ACTIVITIES OF BURGESS HILL TOWN COUNCIL IN 2021/22**

The Town Mayor presented the Annual Report (attached at Appendix 1) on the work of the Town Council for the period 2021/2022.

The Mayor welcomed the attendees to the meeting and presented a PowerPoint (attached at Appendix 2) to the audience, with an explanation of the events that had been undertaken by Burgess Hill Town Council over the previous year. She explained that many events had been funded by the 'Welcome Back Fund',

a European Regional Development Fund.

Also mentioned were the 'Bridge the Gap' initiative, led by the Kiln, the new Petanque Rink that had been built at Fairfield Recreation Ground and the promises of the Burgess Hill Regeneration 2020.

The Town Mayor explained that during her time as Mayor, she had 'undertaken 43 different gigs, all of which were fantastic fun'. She mentioned that her charity had been The Kangaroos, and thanked Councillor Chapman for organising a great Mayor's Quiz in December.

5. **BURGESS HILL PANTRY**

Councillor Joseph Foster, the Deputy Leader of the Town Council presented the report on the Burgess Hill Pantry (attached at Appendix 3). He explained to residents that he was the Chair of Trustees at the Burgess Hill Pantry and gave them some background information on the Pantry and its role in the community.

The Pantry was a new project started by the Burgess Hill Town Council providing support services for local residents. The main aims of the Pantry were dignity, choice and hope. The Pantry aimed to give its members secure access to good food, as this is a basic right. They considered their services to be a 'hand-up not a hand-down', as the services were membership based with members contributing a small amount weekly. The Pantry allowed members to come in and choose their own products from the shelves and aimed to help reduce the cost of weekly shopping bills with the hope of easing the pressure of the cost of living.

Councillor Foster explained the timeline of the Burgess Hill Pantry. The Pantry was founded at the beginning of the pandemic and received funding from Burgess Hill Town Council, Clarion Foundation and the Lions. A board was created and the structures for a charity put in place, including the employment of their first member of staff, Julie Smyth. They opened to members in May 2021, and July 2021 was their official launch. By September 2021 they had 100 members, with this passing 200 in January 2022.

Residents were shown pictures of The Pantry's storefront, as well as a range of goods that had been received from Waitrose, Tesco and Co-Op.

Councillor Foster gave some information on the demographic of the Pantry's members, explaining that around 50% lived in social, landlord-based housing, but that there was still a significant proportion in private rental. He explained that there were no criteria to join the Pantry, instead the charity focused on helping those that were struggling. Between May and December of 2021, there had been 1200 volunteer hours undertaken.

Councillor Foster expressed the importance of getting the food to the people, explaining that a large amount of food was donated from Fairshare, as well as local food drives and the Mid Sussex Food Partnership. He mentioned a large individual donation that had been made around Christmas time, helping the Pantry to further help those in need.

Councillor Foster explained that despite the range of sources for food, there was still a lot of pressure and not a lot of excess food available for charities such as the Pantry. He said that there was going to be a focus on the food supply issue, to find more resources.

The funding for the Pantry consisted of restricted funds of £16,000 to cover running costs, as well as some unrestricted funds from donors such as Gateway Baptist Church. There was specific focus on trying to create a diverse range of funding sources.

Councillor Foster read out a range of quotes from members of the Pantry, these reflected a sense of pride and dignity from members.

The Pantry's future focus was on food supplies primarily, as the situation was getting worse for those in need. They were also looking into expansion opportunities, expanding their opening times, additional staffing, community outreach and attempting to remain flexible to the economic situation and the cost of living. Their main focus was to try and ensure that everyone had access to good food.

6. [UPDATES](#)

Councillor Eggleston provided a number of updates on the following points:

- **Beehive**

The tender for demolition of the Royal British Legion building was closing on Friday 15 April. There was a plan for the demolition to begin in May, to be completed in July. There would be a further planning application submitted, as there was a revised plan to eventually incorporate Cyprus Hall into the Beehive.

There were also plans for a new cost evaluation, as both the pandemic and the Ukraine crisis had led to supply issues, increase of material costs and the energy crisis.

There was an aim to start constructing the building in Spring 2023 with an aim to open in late 2024.

- **Park Centre**

West Sussex County Council had previously closed Park Centre and invited parties to express an interest in taking over its use. Burgess Hill Town Council had prepared a bid alongside Clarion Futures, Sussex Clubs for Young People and Escape Youth Club. Councillor Eggleston explained that Burgess Hill Town Council were the preferred bidders and had submitted a business plan. The timescale for the decision was to be the end of April/ early May 2022. Councillor Eggleston was confident that their business plan would be accepted and that Park Centre would soon be back in use. The hope was that Park Centre would become a proper youth club, with mental health support and other activities for young people. He expressed that as soon as there was more information that he would be updating the local residents.

- **Inclusive Town Initiative**

Burgess Hill Town Council had undertaken a new initiative to create a more accessible town for those with disabilities. Having looked at the town, they were identifying what was necessary to make the town better for those with physical disabilities, visual impairments and hidden disabilities. There was a meeting scheduled for 11 May, inviting interested groups to consult with the Town Council and help them to see the town through their eyes.

Councillor Eggleston spoke about the Town Accessibility Plan, and the hope to deliver an action plan to make the town accessible. This would include talking to cafes, supermarkets and other local businesses, to make areas more accessible for people with autism or dementia. One idea was the introduction of accessible hours in supermarkets. He expressed that the 'purple pound' was an important part of the economy and that people with disabilities had an equal right to access. It was expressed that it was important to ensure that they can access the town on an equal basis.

- **Martlets Updates**

Members of the Burgess Hill Town Council had met with Mid Sussex District Council to present two short-term projects, and ask for an update on a bigger project. Councillor Eggleston said that he could not give much in the way of good news, with New River Retail confirming that it had the intention of bringing forward their application and deliver the new Martlets Shopping Area once it was commercially viable.

It was explained that the renovation of the Martlets was 'all-or-nothing', with New River Retail not allowed to undertake part of the renovation, e.g., the residential portion could not be done without the commercial portion also being undertaken.

Councillor Eggleston expressed that the current environment was not great for development, citing the war in Ukraine and the Covid-19 pandemic. This meant that the redevelopment of the Martlets Shopping Area was stalled.

Burgess Hill Town Council were aiming to make the environment better and give it at least a short-term use while the redevelopment was on hold. There were two projects discussed: the Urban Garden and the Little Hive. There was some interest from Mid Sussex District Council for the Urban Garden, and there was a hope that it could be used for a range of community projects.

The Little Hive project would involve transforming part of the old Lidl building into a pop-up community venue and performance centre. The plan would be to have a range of indoor activities and shows. There had also been an expression of interest from a local business to create a monthly comedy club.

Also discussed were two smaller, wrap-around projects to help improve the visual appearance of the old Lidl building and the black boarding on the site of the old library.

Councillor Eggleston expressed that the high street world had changed considerably over the past 10 years, and there were questions to be asked on how to remodel the high street in the modern day.

7. OPEN FORUM

A member of the public spoke to ask why the Town Council was flying the Ukrainian flag.

Town Mayor Eves responded that Burgess Hill Town Council stood in solidarity with the Ukrainian people and deplored the unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine.

A second resident expressed that they were impressed with the Pantry and its services, and asked whether it would be possible to increase the number of allotments in the town, so that people could grow their own food. He asked whether there was any land that the Town Council owned that could be converted, and if there was any other land that would be available to use, such as the Martlets Shopping Area.

Councillor Foster agreed that an increase in allotments would be a good idea, but that certain areas of land – especially the Martlets Shopping Area would involve applying to Mid Sussex District Council for licensing. He said that he could look into the idea and have a future discussion.

Councillor Eggleston said that the only suitable land that Burgess Hill Town Council owned had been earmarked as the second burial ground, which was planned to come into use in 3-4 years, and Batchelors Farm – a nature reserve. He seconded that other areas would not be available for use without permission, due to legalities. He also mentioned that the Northern Arc housing estate has provision for allotments.

A third member of the public asked a question in relation to the second speaker's comments. She asked if it would be possible for people with big gardens to lease out part of their gardens to create allotments.

Councillor Foster responded to say that as gardens are private land, it would be an exchange between the land owner and the tenant. He suggested that it could be done and that the Town Clerk could liaise with landowners to organise something.

A fourth member of the public spoke on behalf of the World's End Association. They said that there had been talk of introducing pedestrian crossings in the area and asked if there was a meeting arranged to discuss this.

Town Mayor Eves gave the floor to Councillor Cherry who explained that there were a number of things being looked at and that they needed the support of the community and schools in the area. He said that once they had arranged it with Highways, the project would begin to move on.

A fifth member of the public expressed the belief that the Town Centre was a disaster and had been destroyed by New River Retail. They asked if there was a way to break with local authorities and be more aggressive in fixing it.

Councillor Eggleston responded with some legal context. He explained that New River were actually redeveloping the Martlets Shopping Area, not the Town

Centre. He expressed the belief that Church Road, Church Walk and the Market Place were still good areas.

Councillor Eggleston explained that New River Retail was the landlord of the Martlets Shopping Area, but that Mid Sussex District Council was the superior landlord. He suggested that the reason that the landlord is not maintaining the façade of the buildings could be due to future redevelopment and a reluctance to spend a lot of money on something that will eventually be torn down.

He stated that the superior landlord (MSDC) could force New River to keep the area in good condition, or do it themselves and give the bill to New River. If New River did not pay then the lease could be terminated. He did however suggest that this may be something that MSDC as the superior landlord would not want to do, as they would undertake a project that could potentially go into the millions. He suggested that Mid Sussex District Council was hit by the pandemic, with the closure of leisure facilities and carparks and that they would prefer to use their reserves to maintain their budget. He noted that it was a difficult position, but went on to say that the position was worse for Burgess Hill. He maintained that the Town Council would not be able to stand up and say that they would overhaul the town. Instead, he could only say that the Council were trying to mitigate the impact and create projects to improve the area in the short term.

The sixth speaker was local MP Mims Davis. She gave some insight as to what was being worked on for the town. She reiterated the sentiments of Councillor Eggleston that it was 'no picnic'; however, she stated that the town needed to be ambitious. The new road to the science park at Brighton University was opening the door for new jobs, and there were global companies in the industrial park that would need hotels and a good Town Centre. She stated that whilst the regeneration of the town would be difficult, that there was still hope with a large, growing community. She reassured the community that she was working on this project and alongside the council. She noted that the regeneration was bigger than solely the Town Council and that all councils needed to work together to ensure that Burgess Hill became the town the community wanted.

A seventh member of the public referenced Councillor Eggleston's previous information on the legalities of the landlord's responsibility in regards to the Martlets Shopping Area. He asked if the landlord (New River Retail) was responsible then why were they not doing the upkeep required. He asked if this was a breach of contract and if it was, could the Town Council do anything about it? He also said that he believed that a lack of parking was responsible for residents shopping online rather than in the town, and that without car parks, there would be no regeneration.

Councillor Eggleston responded stating that in commercial property law, the superior landlord can decide whether they wish to enforce the obligation. He said that it was evident that Mid Sussex District Council was choosing not to, but that he could not specifically say as to why. However, he suspected that it was because the area was a liability, noting that the multi-story carpark in the town was suffering from 'concrete cancer' and that the money required to fix these things would be considerable.

In reference to carparking, Councillor Eggleston mentioned that shops which previously created good footfall in the town had moved away from the centre e.g., Tesco, B&Q and Lidl. He pointed out that when shopping opportunity

decreased, as did footfall. He stated that there was accessible parking at both Waitrose and Cyprus Hall, but that without good shops, people won't necessarily use this parking.

An eighth member of the public mentioned the emerging Mid Sussex District Council Local Plan and the plans to bring more houses to Burgess Hill. He asked if the Town Council was surprised that Burgess Hill was not actually mentioned in the plan.

Councillor Eggleston responded with an explanation that there were two significant brownfield sites, the allocation of which were still to be decided.

There were multiple developments in place already, and he stated that consideration must be made as to whether it was possible to increase density to reduce the need to build on greenfield land. The Town Council had previously opposed allocation of land, south of Folders Lane, and was waiting to hear back on the inspector's decision. Councillor Eggleston said that the District Plan was actually paused, and that he was not sure when it would be restarted, as a reply was necessary from Michael Gove. He suspected that the numbers will not change significantly and that all decisions would be scrutinised closely to ensure that green space was safeguarded.

A ninth member of the public spoke about the boundary review. They asked when was Burgess Hill no longer Burgess Hill? He asked if there were any valid reasons as to why some District Councillors had decided that the Northern Arc was not to be in Burgess Hill after all.

Councillor Eggleston responded that the Northern Arc had always been named the 'Burgess Hill Northern Arc', that the development had grown out of the Town Wide Strategy and that Burgess Hill had been listed as a key stakeholder in the last District Plan. He also stated that Ansty and Staplefield had never been stakeholders in the Northern Arc. He informed residents that there had been attempts at initiating Boundary Reviews previously, but that it had been delayed due to the District Boundaries Review. He said that there was overwhelming evidence, and good administrative reasons, as to why the boundaries should be moved and the Northern Arc made formally part of Burgess Hill. He also stated that in May 2023, residents would elect a District Councillor for Burgess Hill, but without the boundary change, some of these people would be residents of Ansty and Staplefield instead. He encouraged the public to sign the Boundary Review petition and get justice for Burgess Hill and its residents.

MP Mims Davies spoke again to address the previous question. She said that context was important when addressing the Boundary Review. She stated that when she was Councillor for Bolnore there was talk about the possibility of a Bolnore Parish Council, however there were no residents to consult with at the time. Once the area was built and people had moved in, there was a consultation and ultimately, they decided to remain part of Haywards Heath. She stated that the view of the District Council was to look at the boundaries in 2025, once there was a community living in the Northern Arc area to consult with, and then they would be able to decide if they want their own support network, or to join up with Burgess Hill.

Councillor Foster responded that the people of Burgess Hill did not agree with this sentiment and urged residents to sign the petition.

A tenth member of the public stated that she had respect for Councillor Eggleston's remarks on the New River Retail situation, and that she appreciated his realistic comments. She addressed the meeting regarding the need for assistance for SEN children and that there needs to be a lot more done for children with special needs, especially at half term. She stated that every person in the town needed to be taken into consideration, and mentioned that there were people who struggled to access public transport, afford mobility aids and that in some areas, footpaths were not accessible as they were too narrow. She also believed there should be more mental health support in place for the community. The resident asked what the plan was and where did the Council see the town ten years from now?

Town Mayor Eves responded that most of the resident's points would come under West Sussex County Council's jurisdiction, but that the Town Council were working on some projects for young people, such as the bid for Park Centre and the plans for the Little Hive. Also mentioned was Councillor Henwood's 'Summerhaven' group, that ran in the Kiln, as a hub for mental health support. She spoke about the Young Carers events run by the Community Engagement Team, and how they were among the best events she had attended as Mayor. She also mentioned the inclusivity initiative and that she recognised that mental health was an important issue and that the Council were taking steps to put things in place.

An eleventh member of the public asked about the structure near Waitrose and if the Council knew what it was. He stated that he had measured it with a magnetic frequency tester and that the frequencies were 'off the scale'. He asked if there was a safety report in place and whether residents should keep away from it, as he had read studies stating that there were links between 5G and cancer.

Councillor Foster stated that the structure in question was a mobile phone mast. Councillor Eggleston said that it belonged to Ofcom and if the speaker left an email address that the Town Council would look into it and publish a reply.

A twelfth member of the public asked what the plan was for public charging points in the town, for electric cars.

Councillor Foster said that Mid Sussex District Council, along with West Sussex County Council were looking into putting in charging sites across the town, and that there were plans in place for a rapid charger near the Triangle. However, these charging points would require a considerable amount of electricity. He stated that it was good news that there was an initiative in place, and that central government would need to lead the way on this kind of project. Councillor Eves deplored the record of Mid Sussex District Council in maintaining the existing electric vehicle charging points in working order.

A thirteenth member of the public congratulated the Town Council on the range of events that they had put on over the past year. She stated that the people were the town, not the buildings.

Town Mayor Eves agreed with the sentiment and praised Jennifer O'Grady as the Head of the Community Engagement Team.

A fourteenth speaker asked if there was a register of where defibrillators were placed around the town, and whether the Town Council dealt with ones that were in need of repair.

Town Mayor Eves responded that there was a list available online. Councillor Foster stated that in an emergency you could contact 999 and be directed to the nearest point, and that the Council could look into repairs of broken defibrillators.

A fifteenth member of the public made reference to the previous question on 5G and the mobile phone mast near Waitrose, and asked whether there was a risk assessment in place.

Town Mayor Eves gave the floor to another member of the public, who was the Head of the Council for the Protection of Rural England. He recommended that those with concerns look up the report of the National Cancer Institute, which would allay their fears.

A sixteenth member of the public asked why the lights were always on in the old Argos unit in the Marketplace Shopping Centre. She also asked why it was so expensive to rent out a shop front in the town – stating that it was £35,000 a year to rent.

Councillor Eggleston responded that Argos had been acquired by Sainsbury's and had since relocated, but retained the lease. He said that Marketplace was the landlord of the unit and that the lease was set to expire in 2023. He stated that the Town Council had no right to interfere in a private contract, but that it was regrettable that there was ongoing energy wastage. He stated that the shopping centre as a whole was energy inefficient and that utilities were high due to poor insulation. He hoped that the redevelopment could be used to reduce costs and produce renewable energy.

A seventeenth member of the public spoke on behalf of the Burgess Hill Cricket Club. He stated that the club was due to turn 150 this summer, and he thanked the community for staying off the newly re-laid cricket pitch, as it had 'never looked better'. He invited the town to attend the first ever men's and women's cricket game on the 3 July. He said that he believed that the regeneration of the cricket pitch and plans to redevelop the Pavilion showed what could be done if the town worked together with positivity.

An eighteenth member of the public addressed the meeting to say that the Town Council and local councillors were all very helpful and encouraged other members of the community to go out and speak to them. They reiterated a previous speaker's point that the town was not the shops, it was the people and that the important thing was creating a town for future generations.

In her closing remarks, Town Mayor Anne Eves mentioned a range of future events; including the Crafter's Market, a performance by the Burgess Hill Symphony Orchestra, a board game day and the Town Council's Jubilee Fest. She stated that next year's meeting would be brought forward to 14 March 2023, in order to avoid election season.

The meeting ended at 20.47 hours.