

MINUTES of the proceedings of the
BURGESS HILL ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
held on **TUESDAY 20 MAY 2025** at 19.00 hours
at Cyprus Hall, Cyprus Road, Burgess Hill.

Those present included the Town Mayor Stuart Condie and approximately 65 members of the public, including Councillors and Town Council staff.

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Town Mayor Stuart Condie greeted the attendees of the meeting and listeners who tuned in via Mid Sussex Radio. He set out the agenda and format of the meeting. He asked for all contributions please be made to the microphones to allow anyone listening at home to hear.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:

Cllr Robert Eggleston
Cllr Christine Cherry

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 22 May 2024 were **AGREED**.

4. TOWN MAYOR

Councillor Condie stated that the Annual Town Meeting was a meeting of electors, and was required to be called by Statute but has no real power or formal agenda. It was an opportunity to discuss things that the public may wish to, and as Mayor he must chair the meeting but that it was not a Council meeting. For 2025 a new format had been tried to allow people to ask Councillors from the relevant authorities questions.

He added that the Town, District and County Councils all had mechanisms to ask about their work, including attending meetings, speaking to representatives and submitting questions for formal answers, and encouraged all to do so.

He went on to say that we were in the pre-election period for two council wards for County Council, **Burgess Hill North and Hassocks & Burgess Hill South**. He had been advised the meeting could go ahead; however, it could not be used for electioneering.

Councillor Condie then gave an update on the Government Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation as it affects Sussex and of course Burgess Hill. He stated there was a page on the Town Councils website with the briefings that had gone to the Council, and advised people to check the page.

He stated that devolution would not affect the ceremonial position he held as Mayor and also as the Chairman of the Town Council. The new Mayor of Sussex would be similar to the Mayor of London, Manchester or Birmingham, where these roles are directly elected by the public. The Mayor and their staff would have significant responsibility at a Strategic level for items that were expected to include: Transport, Strategic Planning (Housing numbers and Infrastructure), Economic Development and Skills and Policing.

He went on to say this would mean we would have what is to be called a Combined Authority Mayor. The Mayor of Sussex would chair a group called the Combined Authority Cabinet, made up of Council Leaders from individual councils within the combined authority. Initially this would be the leader of East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton and Hove Councils, along with the Leaders of the District Councils. However, that would change quickly as the local reorganisation changed our local councils. The Mayor and his combined cabinet would then lead on the areas under the Mayors remit and deliver for all of Sussex.

The Mayor would be elected every 4 years, with May 2026 as the first. The Mayoral Combined Authority may get a 30-year financial agreement from the Government, meaning that they know how much money they will have from central funds.

The local government reorganisation is slightly different and would affect the County Council and the District Councils. All of them in Sussex, will be abolished in May 2028 and in their place will be a new Unitary authority who will deal with all the services that are not transferred to the mayoral combined authority. Such as refuse, recycling, social services, education, housing, planning etc. which is everything that the County and District Council were currently providing.

At the time of the meeting, it was unknown how many of the 'Unitary' authorities would come in to Sussex, but it was suggested that there would be one for Brighton and Hove but that it may cover a slightly bigger area, one for the remainder of West Sussex and one for the remainder of East Sussex. There were not proposals for changing the County boundary. It was also suggested that Crawley would join with Reigate to make a unitary of its own. Adding decisions would be made in September 2025.

Councillor Condie stated that in 2027 we would go to the polls to elect the shadow cabinet for the new unitary authority, who would start setting up work in 2027 with the full change over in April 2028. Until April 2028, we would have West Sussex County and Mid Sussex District with business as usual for all of the services they provided. Adding, Town and Parish Councils were not affected, and BHTC would continue to do the jobs that we currently did, but

BHTC may pick up some local work from the new unitary, with some services are transferred to the Town Council.

5. RAILWAY 200

Tim Hinton from Bluebell Railway, who is a member and active volunteer, started by stating the railway had held a long connection with Burgess Hill, with many members living in Burgess Hill and up until 1962 there had even been a train to Bluebell.

He stated the Bluebell Railway was first preserved standard gauge railway in the world, and had originally been the East Grinstead line. It had been closed as a public railway in 1958 and in 1963 the line connection to Burgess Hill was removed. Sheffield Park and Horsted Keynes was then leased by British Rail to the preservation society. He added they had many Victorian and Edwardian vehicles and that the line was nationally recognised. Bluebell Railway employed 40 paid staff and had 1000 volunteers.

He said that the railway was celebrating 200 years since opening of Darlington railway, with many events at Sheffield Park and Horsted Keynes over the coming months. They would be working with schools, as well as Guides and Scouts, as well as having the National Exhibition train attending on 23-29 July 2025.

2025 also marked the 65th anniversary of Bluebell Railway, and 150 years of the Stepney steam engine.

He stated that Bluebell Railway were partnering with BHTC, to celebrate the town and Railway 200, with more information to come at a later date.

It was added that at Burgess Hill station, that an original station building remained on platform 1 and had been restored. Additionally, the first female British Rail appointed **Pennie Ballas**, had been based at Burgess Hill station.

6. OPEN FORUM

A member of the public asked with the local government reorganisation would MSDC cease to exist. Councillor Condie responded "Yes".

Councillor Peter Williams was thanked by a member of the public for his leader updates, stating previously there had not been enough communication but that Councillor Williams had been laying out the roles and responsibilities of each Council. He stated he had been particular interested in what had happened to the funds given to MSDC for misplaced users of the Martlets Hall. He went on to question the plans for Beehive, stating that they had continually reinvented, at a cost of £800,000 up to date. He was concerned the long-term costs would be £4-5million if it were to go ahead, and that those funds should be going to what BHTC does best - events and supporting local groups through grants. Councillor Condie stated that there was currently no decision over the Beehive project, but the Council had approved £35,000 in

professional fees to bring a plan forward, ahead of making a decision at next Council meeting.

Another member of the public also asked about the Beehive project, and raised their concerns over the loss of Cyprus Hall, should the project go ahead. Adding groups that use Cyprus Hall were concerned for their future and where they would relocate too. Councillor Condie responded stating he was aware of all the groups meeting at Cyprus Hall and that Beehive went ahead it would not comprise things held at Cyprus Hall.

The next person to speak said that they disagreed with people's objections to the Beehive, and that a town of our size should have a major hall and be ambitious. He then questioned if groups should make provisions to move, in-case they had to leave Cyprus Hall. Councillor Condie replied that after it is considered by the Council, they would know more and not to take any rash steps in the meantime.

Someone then questioned if the devolution happened and MSDC didn't exist, who was going to take responsibility for town centre redevelopment. Councillor Condie stated a contract had been signed between MSDC and developer at the time, adding it was a developer led plan, meaning the developer chose pace and timescale of works. He stated New River were not original developer. It was hoped the Joint Venture would be set up with agreements in place soon, and would then go live. He added the original planning permission terms wouldn't necessarily be right for Joint Venture, and they would need to discuss variations, and therefore to await what development looks like.

A member of the public raised their concerns about devolution, stating "Can you imagine if you didn't have to deal with MSDC but a unity authority, a higher authority, with more power and more bureaucracy?"

Another person raised their concerns about Cyprus Hall being 'eaten' by the Beehive and the impact on groups, asking what could be done to protect the hall. Councillor Condie responded, as he previously had, that BHTC valued Cyprus Hall and more information would be known after the next Council meeting.

A member of the public commented they were concerned to see a planning application for The Salvation Army recently, and asked if BHTC were made aware of applications and sales of buildings such as these, ahead of the public. Councillor Eggleton stated that BHTC was not given prior warning, but the Planning Committee were given chance to comment on these as part of the planning application. It was commented that it was in fact number 35 Cyprus Road, the old printer works that had submitted the recent application, not the Salvation Army building.

A question was asked about how ordinary people would benefit from devolution, as a Town we had already been largely ignored by Chichester. He commented how the government worked in France with locally a lot more

power. He added that the key to devolution must be more decisions made by Burgess Hill residents, not by non-residents. Councillor Condie commented that in Abbeville, one of our twin towns, the Mayor had a staff of 600, that were able to make decisions we couldn't, and he hoped we could add to BHTC's responsibilities in the future. Cllr Eggleton added that there was a power mismatch in terms of planning, with developers holding all the power. He hoped a unitary power may be able to fix that imbalance.

One of the Trustees of Park Centres gave an update, stating that the reopening of the centre was imminent, and they team had been working around the clock to get date in.

Someone commented that they were happy to see grants awarded to youth groups on the list on the Annual Town Report, young people were held the future of the town. Councillor Condie added that there was a great buzz from all the groups in Burgess Hill and they really made the town what it was.

A question was then asked about how BHTC could support the Burgess Hill Cricket Club to further their planning application, as it the new plans had failed the flood risk assessment. They added the Cricket Club was within MSDC remit but the club had been let down by MSDC and Glendale. Councillor Condie expressed his disappointment with the failed flood risk assessment and stated they were trying to support the club and talks were ongoing.

A member of the public stated their relative lived in Double Days, and after the road had been relayed the double yellow lines had been reinstated. They had approached MSDC for assistance in removing the lines, but they had been of little help, and were referred to WSCC and had also spoken with their Ward Councillors. She added that the Councillors were being supportive but that there was an issue with the system. Councillor Eggleton stated that he was supporting to get the lines removed. Cllr Condie added that the Councillor work load was work driven, and advised people to contact their local Councillor.

Someone stated they felt the Town Council might do a better job at managing things such as highways, as opposed to a unitary Council based in Chichester, and hoped it could be brought under the Town Council. Councillor Condie started that vegetation management, pot holes, and small-scale highway job could be done better by BHTC than a Council working over a bigger area and hoped the new unitary Council would spread its bases, rather than being base at the most westerly point of West Sussex.

Meeting terminated at 20.37