

## **BEXHILL TOWN COUNCIL IN WAITING PRESENTATION**

**Apologies** Unfortunately for family reasons, BTCW Chairman, David Gee Chairman BTCW is unable to be present.

### **My involvement**

I have been asked to stand in For David. I am not a Bexhillian – but am beginning to feel like one! I actually live in Mountfield. I have been providing technical advice (mostly informally) to both BTCW and Democracy4Bexhill – the two main groups playing an active role in trying to secure a lower tier of governance in Bexhill. I was asked also by SSLAC to stand in formally for Trevor Leggo during his recent month of sick leave.

For those of you who haven't come across me before: I am the Clerk to Rye and Ewhurst; was briefly Chairman of Mountfield PC – and was Secretary of RALC before Carol kindly took it off my hands!

### **Why two local groups?**

Well, they had originally different – but complementary - objectives. However, they are now more closely aligned aspiration-wise and there is, as you would expect, some membership overlap.

Both groups are non-party political. Members are drawn from a range of political parties – as well as those with no interest in party politics.

As the name suggests, BTCW is preparing for the creation of a town council or, in the event that one is not formed in the near future, an organisation or structure that is able to carry out a similar role to a town/parish council. It is taking advice from those familiar with parish/town councils and is setting up themed working groups to establish local needs and how these might be met. It is particularly keen to involve those under the age of 25.

**D4B** was formed by some of the 4,000 Bexhillians who petitioned RDC for a CGR.

With the passing of the 2007 Local Government Public Involvement in Health Act responsibility for deciding whether an area should be parished shifted from the Secretary of State to the local district/borough council.

D4B's original aim was to encourage participation in the Review. Although, at that time, it had no preferred outcome a number of its more prominent members favoured an area committee. However, because a number of the Review consultation options have been weakened as they have travelled from the Rother's Bexhill Community Governance Steering Group – to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – to Cabinet – and then to full Council, D4B is now 100% behind the Town Council option and has been delivering leaflets and response post cards to every household in Bexhill encouraging prospective parishioners to support a Town Council.

As a result of two successful procedural challenges, anyone – not just Bexhillians – is able to comment on Stage 2 of the Review consultation – and the deadline for responses has been extended to 31 October.

The CGR options are:

**1 No change** – ie RDC would continue to provide services in Bexhill (charging those enjoyed by Bexhillians only to the Bexhill Special Expense – c£665,000pa) and the Bexhill Charter Trustees would continue to carry out civic-ceremonial functions following the abolition of Bexhill Borough Council in 1972-74. (It is anticipated that this option is likely to be the one that be adopted later in the year.)

**2 A Town Council for Bexhill** – incorporating all the Bexhill District Wards. This was the most popular public choice at the conclusion of the Stage 1 consultation. The Charter Trustees would be incorporated within the new council.

**3 Area Committee for Bexhill** – This would comprise the 18 Bexhill Ward Members. Because the ruling group has decided that an area committee would have no delegated authority this would simply be a means of raising – and discussing – concerns. It could be argued that this exists already in the form of the Bexhill Town Forum.

Area committees in other parts of the country have devolved budgets and allocated officer time.

**4 Four parish councils covering East, West, North and South Bexhill.** It is suggested that these would align with the County Council divisional ward

boundaries. This is likely to cost more than a single town council and would not necessarily reflect natural communities on the ground.

There was a more appropriate option on the table at an earlier stage: a parish council for Cooden and Sidley – and a town council for the remainder of Bexhill.

**Rye Town Council** has made representations during both consultation stages – it has a long-standing desire to see a town council created in Bexhill.

Bexhill is one of a handful of English and Welsh towns of a similar size that does not have a town council. Aside from East Guldeford, it is the only community in Rother that does not have its own parish/town council.

Rye Town Council recognises that the decision on whether or not to have a town council in Bexhill it is properly the decision of its residents; however, it believes that the resulting local transparency, accountability and ability of such a council to identify, and respond to, unmet local needs – and engage with parishioners and local businesses - can only bring benefits to the town.

Furthermore, a town council in Bexhill might go some way towards addressing the suspicion amongst some Rural Rother residents that Rother spends proportionately more in Bexhill – and the grievance held by some Bexhillians that Rural Rother Ward Members have a greater say over Bexhill's affairs because there are, simply, more of them!

### **Lastly**

Had David Gee been present this evening he would have:

- a)** Flagged up the CRG Review and encouraged Battle TC to respond to the Stage 2 consultation – perhaps, at least, highlighting the potential benefits of a town council in Bexhill. (As at last Friday Rother had received around 7,500 responses to Stage 2.)
- b)** Suggested that Battle, Rye and a Bexhill Town Council could work together on any mutually beneficial initiatives.

Richard Farhall, 17.10.17