

ERITH TOWN FORUM MEETING

Notes of the 81st meeting of the **ERITH TOWN FORUM** held at VETS Club, Park Crescent (junction with Glebe Way), Erith on WEDNESDAY 20 JULY 2011 at 7pm.

Present: Doreen Ives (Chair)
Joan Armitage (Bexley Civic Society), Chris Betts (Frogmore), Chris Broadbent (Disabilities Groups), DJ (Erith Riverside Res. Assoc.), Alison Fisher (Erith Rowing Club), Fred Finck (Erith Yacht Club), Andrew Grieve (BATS), Ray Hudson (Bexley Neighbourhood Watch Assoc.), Phillippa James (Bexley Care Trust), Barry Owen (Erith Riverside Shopping Centre), Denis Roberts (Baptist Church, Erith), Alec Tapper (Forge), Councillor Edward Boateng, Councillor Margaret O'Neill, Julie Clark (Minute/Admin officer)

Members of the Public:

L Finch, D Ridgeway, M Peat, A Finck, J Butler, M Butler, D Brodie, E Brodie, M Beadle, J McCarthy, J Baxter, C Wakeman, R Durrant

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Forum Members: Mike Dodsworth, Derek Johnson, Jerry Martin, Rosemary White, Cllr. Chris Ball

Others: David Evenett MP, Teresa Pearce MP

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. She welcomed the Principal and Vice Principal of Erith College, Danny Ridgeway and Martin Peat. The Chair also welcomed Andrew Grieve the Chief Executive of BATS (Bexley Accessible Transport System). Doreen thanked Andrew for agreeing to be a member of the Forum and said it was nice to have another Business Representative. The Chair informed the meeting that the BATS item would be taken first on the agenda.

2. BEXLEY ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT NEW PROJECTS

Andrew spoke explaining that BATS are a community transport scheme based in Thames Road and have been operational since 2004. He said they started very modestly but now manage 48 vehicles 90 staff and are a non profit organisation managed by a Board of Trustees. Having grown very quickly, Andrew said he hoped they had not got too big to listen to the local community. He explained he was very happy to come onto the Forum to keep everyone up-to-date with what BATS are doing and also to find out things that the community actually need. He talked about the Hop 'n' Shop Bus Scheme which started in 2007 and benefits mainly the elderly and disabled but is also intended to assist parents with children under 5. It provides a service in conjunction with the London Borough of Bexley to provide access to supermarkets, shops, garden centres, markets etc. He explained they have a 938 Community Bus Route on a Monday and Thursday. He also touched on further developments of healthy eating and a mobile health service for smoking cessation and diabetics. He said all these are good services the community need. He continued to say that more recently they have had the opportunity to takeover and operate the shop mobility scheme in Bexleyheath. It is currently based on the roof top of the car park. He explained that it was increasingly becoming a nuisance for Bexley Council to operate. Andrew said they contacted us to take this service over and we accepted. He said it currently runs 3 days from 10-3pm and said we aim to open longer hours. At the moment it is hampered by being housed in the porter cabin on the roof. BATS have negotiated with the shopping centre and have new premises on the 2nd floor near the lifts. He said they are 3 empty store rooms which can have a shop front put on. BATS will finance it, but we need to get increased funding to pay for volunteers' expenses etc. BATS aim to make this a focal point for people with disabilities to get advice eg. about Inspire, Bexley Cross Road Services etc. It may be a one day a week advice service. Grant applications have been made to get new scooters and equipment. He said we would like to get an accessible people carrier to have a proper dedicated shuttle service door to door. He said the Shop Mobility scheme has made a great effort but has not been open at key times of the year. BATS intend to do Bexleyheath on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and maybe say Wednesday in Erith. He said there is no Shop Mobility scheme in Erith and we think the town would benefit from one.

Andrew continued and said there are lots of different opportunities to work together and find out your views and what you need in your area. He said we also have our own workshop to service our own vehicles.

3. CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair informed the meeting that the constitutional changes made at the AGM have been formerly written up and will be posted on our Website, together with the meeting papers and the Minutes of the May AGM. Doreen said we have distributed

our Summer issue 23 of Town and Around. Doreen continued to say that she is currently talking to Bexley Voluntary Service Council about funding. She said articles for the Autumn issue need to be with her by early October. The Chair thanked Denis and Rena for organising the Senior's outing to Southend. Doreen said she had been working closely with Forge and Alec Tapper will report later on this as well as there being a report on the Selkirk project. Doreen said the River and the Gardens have taken up a lot of the Management Committee's time, including of course the cancellation of the Riverside Festival. The Chair emphasised the need to start making plans early and raise funds so as not to miss another year. The Chair said the Christmas lights also need thinking about now. She said apparently the Council have agreed to the use of the lamp posts this year – nothing in writing yet! The Chair thanked Terry Middleditch for attending a Disabled Go event, which Chris Broadbent will report on later and she also thanked Ray Hudson for attending the Riverside Resources Forum meeting. She also informed the meeting that a team from Erith Swimming Club were swimming the Channel that night and wished them luck.

4. BEXLEY COLLEGE REPORT

The Chair introduced Danny Ridgeway and Martin Peat from Bexley College.

Danny Ridgeway introduced himself as Principal of the College. He spoke about the two sites in upper Belvedere and said in total there were two and a half thousand students there, full time and part time and of all levels. He said his main interest is making sure the college provides top class education and training and in order to do this we need good facilities. He said Hollyhill site is fine but Tower Road is well past its sell by date. He said we looked at a number of options. He said the existing site requires so much money to refurbish etc, so that was not an option. He said we have purchased the Tramshed site in Walnut Tree Road from the local authority to build a £20m new college. The Tower site will be developed for housing. He continued to say we are now at the stage where we are drawing up a full planning application starting with some public exhibitions in the first instance. He said these would be on Thurs 21st July 3-8.30pm, Fri 22nd July 1.30-6pm in Erith Library and Sat 23rd July 10-2pm in the College. He said there will be more details at these exhibitions and you can talk to members of the team. He said we want your feedback. He said the timescale is for the new college to be opening 2013/14.

Martin Peat spoke about the artist's diagrams which were handed out. Showing how buildings would sit in the Walnut Tree Road and Stone wood Road. He said it opens up views and access between the station and the old Carnegie building making sure it's easily accessible. He said we want it to be as accessible as possible. He said there will be a public café and gymnasium with good facilities.

Ray Hudson questioned sufficient parking. Mr Peat said the parking was limited but the hope is more people will use public transport. Cllr. O'Neill asked if they would back the Forum's needs to have disabled access at Erith Station. Mr Peat said they would totally support it.

Alison Fisher asked how long it would be before the College opens. Mr Peat said the aim was for 2013/14 academic year. DJ asked how high the College would be. Mr Peat said the top of the building would be lower than those buildings in Stonewood Road. Chris Broadbent said we have had lots of trouble with school children in the town, he said more youngsters may make it worse. Mr Peat said more students were older. The Chair said it will be a different level of student. Martin Peat said it would bring economic value to the area. Barry Owen said he thought we just got caught out with the youngsters recently where the police had moved them on from Bexleyheath. He said it had improved.

Martin Peat also handed out pictures of how the other site would look. He said The Tower Road block structure is still under discussion. The pictures showed how housing would be built. A member of public asked if there was a limitation for style. Mr Peat said one block of flats would be a quarter of the height of the college now. He encouraged the public and members of the Forum to come to the exhibitions. Alec Tapper asked how many housing units there would be. Mr Peat replied 192. A member of the public said she was pleased this was happening because we have been trying to get something good in Erith. Chris Betts asked how many students. Mr Peat said there would be 600 a day and 140 staff. A member of the public asked what disability access there would be. Mr Peat advised those interested or concerned to go and have a look at the exhibitions.

5. TREASURER'S REPORT

The Chair reported that as at the Management Meeting on 29th June there was a balance of £2,794.66. She said that will have gone down just under £2,000 due to the latest issue of Town and Around. She said the position is quite healthy.

6. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETING (MARCH)

Queen Street Zebra Crossing

Cllr. Neill said she did not think we would get this.

Lowering Shopping Centre Bike Signs

Barry Owen said we have got notices up but said this is still an issue. He said we have taken bikes off kids and told them their mum will have to come and collect it. He said a chap on a bike did knock someone over and injured her. He said we have got signs up and we are doing what we can. He said our security guards cannot touch them. A member of the public said have we lowered the signs to say no bicycles. Barry Owen said he will look at it and could put more signs up. The Chair said to wait until the court case was over. (ACTION: BARRY OWEN)

Regarding the school children problem the Chair asked Cllr. Boateng if he could go into St Columbus to talk to them.

(ACTION: CLLR. BOATENG)

7. RIVERSIDE SHOPPING CENTRE

Chris Betts said the Pound Shop was opening this weekend in the old Wises building and Nemesis Gym had an open day on 30th July. He said they were having some stalls again then leading up to the summer event on August 27th when Peppa Pig would be visiting. He said the Easter event with stalls etc had been a great success. He said there would be another similar event in the autumn. He reported that the stallholders would be encouraged to come more often to try and create a small market feeling. The mystery retailer was taking longer than expected to open but would be in place nextdoor to Barnados soon. Chris reported on the Florist who he said had decided to pack up and retire. Chris said the lease came up for renewal but as he has 4 other shops and was trying to wind down the business he decided not to renew. The Chair said they were sorry to see the florist go. The Chair said she thought that the shopping centre seemed busier and has progressed over the last 12 months. Chris Betts said hopefully we will get a few more retailers in.

8. UPDATE ON MAJOR DEVELOPMENT SITES – CARNEGIE AND EWG

Nothing to report.

9. FORGE UPDATE

Alec Tapper reported that on Friday 1st July the petition was presented to Teresa Pearce MP with a total of 1,422 signatures. He said Teresa thanked everybody. He said it has been presented on the floor in the House of Commons and also a copy was presented to Bexley Council with a very forceful commentary on what the residents want. Alec reported on the 2nd Erith Thames Riverside Clean Up on 9th July. He said there was Thames 21, Forge, Morrisons (who provided lunch packs), Erith SNT Police Team, Erith army cadets, 2 Erith Councillors, Director of Bexley Waste Management and Recycling and other residents some from Chichester Wharf. He continued, the area targeted was the river foreshore from the pier alongside Morrisons. Alec said the outcome was one and a quarter tons of metal removed and at least a dozen large bags of litter. Alec said that the future plans included the appointment of a River Keeper for the River Cray and Erith Thames Foreshore. Alec said we hope to have the cleanup as a regular feature. Finally, Alec said a thorough and well developed presentation of Forge' case to retain the flagpole site as an integral part of the Riverside Gardens was made by Joan to a full meeting of the Bexley Council last Wednesday. He said a key piece of information from the Chairman of the Regeneration Committee was that "a final decision has yet to be made regarding the flagpole site of the Gardens". Alec said they are clearly looking at it again – a ray of hope.

The Chairman said the document presented to the Council will go on the website www.ErithForum.org.uk. Margaret O'Neill thanked Alec and Joan. She said it was a very compelling speech.. She said I have produced some posters personally to put in people's windows to show how strongly we feel. Margaret held up some posters reading "Hands off the Riverside Gardens". She urged people to get them put up wherever they could, shop windows, blocks of flats etc. She said she wanted this done personally, not for Forge, not the Labour Party or the Forum but for herself.

Joan McCarthy said they had put a case to the planning department too and asked the Chair if that too should go on the website. The Chair asked Joan to email it to her and she would arrange to have it put on through Alan Boakes.

10. POLICE PANEL MEETING

The Chair reported as Jerry Martin was not in attendance. She said the meeting had been poorly attended so hoped more people would get to the next meeting on 11th October. She said it is really important to attend these meetings. She said with all the cuts happening if not enough people attend they will cut the police time. The Chair said the 3 priorities set were:

1. Residential Burglary
2. Loose Rubbish fires
3. Drugs

She said the previous priorities were:

1. Metal Thefts
2. Residential Burglary
3. Arsons

She commented that fires are deliberately being started. The Chair said that 20% of all fires in the Borough occurred in Erith. In the first half of 2011 out of 39 fires in Erith 20 were defined as loose rubbish fires.

The Chair said that metal thefts were causing lots of concern. The police have been quite successful in intercepting lorries and intercepting criminals in other respects. Eg. Untaxed and uninsured vehicles. Alec Tapper said metal theft had become a greater problem in Erith and the whole Borough. Ray Hudson talked about cuts in sergeants and said there could be 1 sergeant for two wards.

11. ROBINSON CRUSOE EVENT

Cllr. O'Neill said they had the £2,000 funding from the Co-operative Community Fund She said there would be an event in the summer and an event on October 15th. She said there would be a fun day in August and on July 30th groups of people would be running a stand where children can ice biscuits. She said on 2nd 9th and 16th August there would be workshops on skills needed on an island on how to make a treasure chest. Margaret said on 13th September there would be an exhibition opening in Hall Place of children's work from the Art Exhibition and she thanked Joan Armitage who helped to judge the competition. The Chair asked if there were lots of entrants. Cllr. O'Neill said there were quite a few.

12. PLANNING APPLICATION

The Chair reported on 68 Pier Road (opp. Blockbuster) becoming a Family Entertainment Centre. The Chair confirmed it is going to be a children's play area with kitchen facilities for children's parties. The Chair said there had been concern that it may be for an arcade! Cllr. Boateng thanked the Chair for that information because he said he had been receiving lots of letters from worried residents.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

a) Chris Broadbent reported on Disable Go – He said Terry went to the Inspire Centre. He said from the website you can get access to weekend breaks, accessible doctors, advice on chair lifts, educational places to go. The Chair asked if it was a new website. Chris said it was originally for Bromley only – www.disablego.com Philippa James said she had gone to the first meeting. She said you have to fill in a form of where you would like to go and then two people would do a site visit, then from this they form a directory.

b) Vet's Club Summer Fete – 13th August

The Chair reminded those in attendance of the fete. She said the Forum have said they will have a bric-a-brac stall and said it was a good way of advertising the Forum. She said it is £5 a stall and any monies raised will go to the Forum. The Chair welcomed any help.

c) Town and Around

The Chair said she needed any items for the next Town and Around by early October.

d) Ray Hudson reported on the Riverside Resources Forum meeting he had attended. He commented on problems with the build up of sludge in the river.

14. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Date of next meeting: 28th September 2011 at the Vets Club

Dates of future meetings: 30th November 2011, 25th January 2012, 28th March 2012, 23rd May 2012 (AGM)

The meeting closed at 9.15pm