

ERITH TOWN FORUM MEETING

Notes of the 95th meeting of the **ERITH TOWN FORUM** held at VETS Club, Park Crescent (junction with Glebe Way), Erith on WEDNESDAY 29th January 2014 at 7pm.

Present: Doreen Ives (Chair)
Bill Brookes (Erith Playhouse Theatre), DJ (Erith Riverside Res. Assoc.), Alison Fisher (Erith Rowing Club), Fred Finck (Erith Yacht Club), Les Hoskins (Erith Rotary Club), Ray Hudson (Bexley Neighbourhood Watch Assoc.), Phillippa James (NHS Community Engagement Officer), Dennis Roberts (Baptist Church, Erith), Alec Tapper (Forge), Rosemary White (Erith Park Residents), Councillor Chris Ball, Councillor Margaret O'Neill, Julie Clark (Minute/Admin officer)

Members of the Public:

D Brodie, E Brodie, C Wakeman, L Finch, A Finck, K Hadley, J McCarthy, J Ferreira, A Oppong-Asape, R Read

Guests: Gill Bates – Bexley Foodbank

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Forum Members: Joan Armitage, Cllr. Edward Boateng, Mike Dodsworth, Gerry Martin, Barry Owen, Rena Papa, Terry Middleditch (Deputising for Chris Broadbent)

Others: Teresa Pearce MP, Danny Ridgeway and Martin Peat – Bexley College

2. CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and said she hoped 2014 would be a successful year for everyone and Erith Town. She said that Erith is busy with much construction going on such as the College, Erith Park, homes on the Working Men's Club site and now possibly on the site of the old Pop-in-Parlour. Doreen said all these new homes should increase custom for the Town Centre businesses and maybe we will be able to attract a regular market once again. She said it would be good to recruit new members to the Forum from our new community. The Chair continued to say that since the last meeting her main focus has been with the Christmas Tree Festival and the Erith Fun Day arrangements which will be covered later in the Agenda. The Chair said that the petition against the removal of the Bexley Archives to Bromley had been moderately successful in as much as a stay of execution was achieved and discussions are taking place as to what compromise Bexley Council is willing to make. Doreen questioned whether there would be some place for the Carnegie Library building in this scenario. She spoke about the need to keep on the Agenda for 2014 the issue of access to Erith Railway station and also mentioned the need to be ready with our ideas and arguments again with regards interest from developers in the Erith Western Gateway project, due to the upturn in the economic climate.

3. TREASURER'S REPORT

Joan was absent at the meeting so the Chair reported a healthy balance of £2,976.74. She said out of that we have still to pay the people who provided the Xmas lighting. She said Barry Owen has reported that we may get some funding from Wilkinsons. The Chair said there is £985 from the Alexander Selkirk day funds and invited Cllr. O'Neill to explain what the plans were for this money. Cllr O'Neill spoke about the idea of having a sign post with 2 fingers – one saying Lago and the other Fernandes Island, this is the island where he was marooned. The post to be positioned on the eastern side of the Riverside Gardens next to the information board near the causeway. Margaret said there were a few issues to be resolved with regard to planning permission. She said fortunately the Rotary Club of Erith is a registered Charity so the charge will be reduced. Cllr. O'Neill said they have asked pupils at Erith School to design the sign post.

4. FOOD BANKS

The Chair welcomed Gill Bates to the Forum who had come to give an update on the food bank in Erith. Gill introduced herself as the Manager for Bexley Food bank the role she has been in since October 2012. Now there are 1700 people using the facility each for different reasons, unemployment, reduction in benefits, low income families, some bad management of money. Clients are referred by the Citizen Advice Bureau or the Job Centre and are given a voucher for the food bank. There are 4 distribution centres. The one in Erith will open on 12th February and will run from Queen Street Baptist Church – Wednesday 10-1pm, Saturday 10-1pm. Centres are run by volunteers. Gill said The Council has made sure there are buses in place because at the moment they cannot provide transport. A vouchers entitles a client to a weeks worth of dry food eg. packets, tins also household necessities such as toilet rolls. All goods are donations from churches and schools especially around Harvest time. The people of Bexley are very generous. Bexley Council have made some storage space available to them.. New welfare rules are making life difficult, but of course some people make their own bad fortune. 3 vouchers = 3 weeks. This is the normal allowance although sometimes more are given. The Chair asked who the Trust was. Gill said it is Trussell Trust

which is a registered charity. The Chair queried how do you know the people who need your help. Gill said I attend welfare reform meetings, surgeries, schools, Citizens Advice Bureau etc. She said there is a Trussell Trust website with updates etc on. Cllr. O'Neill asked about the Food Bank in Thamesmead. Gill said this is a bit of a query but is run by Greenwich. She said it is run independently. Dennis Roberts asked Gill to tell the Forum how we can all help. You can become a volunteer and said we are going to work with Evergreen, all details are on the website. She said we have support from Tesco's and Asda. The Chair asked about Morrisons but Gill said nothing material yet. Dennis asked "so if we get an extra tin in our shopping do we bring in down to the food bank?" Gill said "yes that would be great if you are able bodied and there will be boxes outside the churches for donations". Those who are not able bodied the donations can be collected. The Chair commented that 3 weeks is a short time to turn someone around. Gill agreed and said Trussell Trust have the statistics and a database etc to keep an eye on it all. The Chair said the Adult Education offer free cooking class courses. Gill said we do have some recipes and ideas to make the food go further. Dennis said the contact at the church is Peter Bingham and can be contacted on 01322 331227. The Chair asked if Gill could forward any relevant information on to her so she could distribute to the Forum.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETING (NOV 2013)

Alec Tapper asked for an amendment to these Minutes. On page 3 8 lines down "He said they plan to withdraw all funding for parks etc" to read "He said they plan to withdraw some funding for parks etc".

Vermin in the town – Cllr. O'Neill said she had sent an email and was under the impressions it was all in hand. Members of the public said they have sighted them in the gardens still. Cllr. O'Neill to follow up again. **(ACTION: CLLR. O'NEILL)**

Erith Park Progress

Rosemary White updated the meeting and said on 14th February there would be a topping out ceremony which is where they put the roof on the first building it will be at 9.30am. She commented that they are getting on really well with the Dell and have named some streets – Main Road to be Callender Road others to be Downton Mews after John Downton an Artist and Philosopher, Gunning Place after an Erith Builder and Philanthropist and Butler Drive after Edward Butler who invented the motor tricycle in 1884. Also Starky Place, Beadle Place and Palbert Place – named after Erith families. Rosemary said they will soon start on Phase 2 plans.

Bexley College Progress – The Chair reported the concrete had all been laid and that they are still on schedule to open in September 2014.

Christmas Lights/Carol Singing in the Centre

The Chair reported saying the lights were better and more colourful. She said she has not received the invoice for them yet. She said the carol singing was very good and enthusiastically supported. She said it has been suggested that more days next year and she said all three churches will work together again on this.

6. HEALTH ISSUES – PHILLIPPA JAMES PRESENTATION

To begin with Phillippa spoke about the leaflets she had handed out to those present explaining them briefly. She said one gives you information on where to go for the different types of care, choosing the best place for you to go - eg A&E , Pharmacist, GP, Minor Injuries Unit etc. She informed the meeting that the walk in services in Crayford would be at Erith Hospital as of 1st April open from 8am-8pm. She showed another leaflet which she said shows our vision and is an interactive diagram on the website www.qmh.oxleas.nhs.uk. She continued to say that since the Administrator was brought in, South London Health Care had been dissolved and QM would stand on its own and would work in a different way. The leaflets detailed services that would be at QM Hospital. She said as of 1st October Oxleas had taken over the site. She said there is £30M - £5M on buildings and maintenance, £25M on constructing new buildings and refurbishing buildings as well as existing services creating an attractive and welcoming hospital. She continued to say Oxleas have a QM pot and the sale of the land goes straight back into the hospital. She said it was a better outcome for staff. Rosemary said there was so much shock horror when it was thought QM was going to be shut down, are people now satisfied? Phillippa said that all the things that are going to happen at QM are for the good. She said A block is going to be demolished and all is going into B block. She said B block will be the core of the hospital. The Chair asked about the maternity bit being turned into an elderly nursing home. Phillippa said Hyde Housing have a leasehold on that bit and are buying the freehold. Phillippa said we have had stands in Asda and Tesco's and people say we have heard all this before, but she said it does make sense. She said if you need a hospital stay that will not happen at QM you will go to your specialist hospital. She said there will be no A&E, but social care etc will be better. Dennis said it is all going to start this year completing by 2016.

A member of the public asked if they would be sorting out the parking. Phillippa said yes they would. Margaret O'Neill said the minor injury unit at Erith Hospital is right next to the doctor's surgery and has a very small waiting area and asked whether they would move to a bigger space. Phillippa was not sure on this. The Chair thanked Phillippa.

7. RIVERSIDE SHOPPING CENTRE – UPDATE

The Chair reported saying not much was moving, no new lets but lots of leaking roofs! She reported the shops had a very good Christmas with some stores doing particularly well.

8. FORGE

Alec spoke about the winter planting and the flower beds reporting that they drain very well. He said they have money to do spring planting later. Alec reported 2 unhappy knocks, informing the meeting that having done a walk along Erith residential foreshore up to and including West Street the whole of the foreshore was clear up to Xmas. However, over the New Year period some characters had disposed of 7 new Morrisson trolleys by the causeway. He informed the meeting that they will be doing another clean up the following Sunday. He said FORGE are grateful to Thames 21 for coming forward to help. Morrisons have been hit by sickness so were not sure if they could spare any members of staff. Alec said the trolleys need to be removed to prevent copycat action. The clear-up would start at 9.3am on Sunday. Alec continued to talk about the flood wall defences and the neglect to the riverside garden bushes and shrubs and that the roots and branches have broken through and damaged the wall. This was reported to Parks and Open Space and the local police. The Chair asked if the local authority will be replacing the bricks. Alec said the bricks were delivered to site but said he had not had a chance to check if they had been cemented in yet, which he said is a worry because they could just be picked up and thrown into the river. Alec told the meeting that Forge have invited the Mayor to make an informal visit to the Riverside Gardens on 14th April followed by refreshments in the Running Horses. Cllr. O'Neill asked if the lower walk way could be closed off because of the bricks. Alec said the bricks he was talking about are high up.

9. ERITH FUN DAY

Cllr. O'Neill gave an update confirming the date as 30th August at the Riverside Gardens. She said we are trying to make it exciting and are working on a programme. There is a small committee and one of the ideas put forward is to encourage people to come and sell their products. The local Allotment Association has been approached. Small cottage industries such as jewelry making, flower arrangements, plants, cakes etc Margaret said we have limited funding from the Barge day and funding from sponsors and it should be a good day. A member of the public asked if they would be charging to have a stand. The Chair said if it was a charity we would charge £10, a small business £15 or a large business £30. She said we really want small businesses to come in. Alison Fisher enquired whether they were intending closing the road and Margaret O'Neill said no. The Chair said we are looking for people to be stewards on the day. A member of the public mentioned the Army Cadets but the Chair said they had already been approached and had something else on that day. Cllr. O'Neill mentioned the Air Cadets.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

a) Regeneris Consultants – Bexley Economic Plan

Cllr. Ball said this had all gone very quiet. Alec Tapper asked how much this consulting all costs. Chris ball said it is into 6 figures.

b) Erith Recreation - A member of the public brought up that it appeared the gates in the playground at Erith Recreation had been locked the past few nights. Cllr. O'Neill said she could find out and said there is a security firm that comes round. Member of the public said it had been locked day and night. Cllr. Ball said the parks get inspected daily and if there is a defect on any of the equipment they will not open it until it has been rectified. Cllr. O'Neill agreed to get it checked.

(ACTION: COUNCILLORS)

c) Avenue Road - A member of the public brought up the issue of Avenue Road pavements again. The issue was discussed and Cllr. Ball re-emphasised that they do a visual inspection twice a year and will do a repair on that stretch if it requires it.

d) 1st World War Anniversary - A member of the public brought up the suggestion of doing something to mark the anniversary of the 1st world war – 4th August. A member of Forge said they had been approached about the possible planting of poppies at the flagpole. Cllr. O'Neill said we could get our historian to come and talk to us. The Chair said it would be something to discuss at the Forum Management Meeting.

e) Erith Station Access - Cllr. O'Neill informed the meeting that she had gone to Erith Station giving out leaflets regarding access. She said the response was marvelous and said we need to get a petition going again and said she would like to suggest the Forum get behind it as well. A member of the public said we need toilets as well. Les Hoskins mentioned about linking over the bridge but Margaret O'Neill said it is not feasible to put another walk way down. Les Hoskins said he thought it could be something to ask. Margaret O'Neill said she would get the petition going.

(ACTION: CLLR. O'NEILL)

11. DATES OF FUTURE MEETING

Date of next meeting: 26th March 2014 at the Vets Club

Dates of future meetings: AGM 21st May 2014 The meeting closed at 8.50pm.