

EAST GRINSTEAD TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 7TH APRIL 2010

Present: Councillor L Marmara (Town Mayor)
Councillors Mrs Bennett, Mrs Brunsdon, Mrs Collins DL, Mrs Mainstone and Mrs Waddingham
Councillors Baldwin, Banks, Gillbard, Johnson, Joyce-Nelson, Mainstone, Musk, and Reed.

Also present: 11 members of the public.

1 Apologies for absence: Councillors Barnett, Dixon, Quinn and Starmer.

2 Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Wednesday 8th April 2009

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting, held on Wednesday, 8th April 2009, having been previously circulated be confirmed and signed by the Town Mayor as a true and correct record.

3 East Grinstead and District Association for Mental Health

The Chairman was pleased to welcome and introduce Mandy Dyer, Secretary of East Grinstead and District Association for Mental Health, his official charity for his Mayoral year.

Mrs Dyer began by explaining that East Grinstead and District Association for Mental Health comprises a small local committee of 17 that includes three people who experience mental ill health, two carers of family members with mental illness and one retired professional.

The Charity was formed in 1952 when a local family gave a house on Ashdown Forest to be a home for unmarried mothers. The Charity later relocated to East Grinstead to be a short term residential home called Sunny Corner for women recovering from mental/ill health. Four bedsits nearby were also run by the charity as a stepping stone back to independent life.

In the 1990's new regulations were introduced which necessitated 24 hours care by qualified staff. The residents paid a minimal rent which was totally inadequate for two paid staff. As a consequence the house was handed over to Sussex Oakleaf Housing Association (SOHA) in 1997. SOHA provide housing for residents and then help them to live independently Sunny Corner has since been sold by SOHA.

Mrs Dyer said that the Charity currently runs a number of projects. This includes physical activity on Mondays at Freedom Leisure – badminton and table tennis. There is also a creative expressions art group. Now in its seventh year this project which is run jointly with SOHA is going from strength to strength. Regularly between four and eight students attend at Springvale Community mental health centre for two hours every Thursday afternoon. They are taught a range of skills by different professional artists and produce beautiful art works of their own. This creativity provides a tremendous boost to students self esteem. Last year they designed an attractive Christmas card which was sold locally and produced a welcome

contribution to the Charity's funds, in addition to raising the Association's profile. Many of the paintings will be on display at the Association's second exhibition, to be held for two weeks at Chequer Mead Community Arts Centre beginning on 28 May. Mrs Dyer drew attention to the leaflets promoting this, which were available to be taken away, and encouraged everyone present to look in at some time.

She said that the Association also actively engages in conservation projects. Every Friday morning two volunteers from the committee take a group to a conservation site called the Briars in Hartfield. Here they take part in a variety of activities such as ditch digging, bramble pulling, lighting bonfires or, for the less energetic, filling birdfeeders, or harvesting fruit and vegetables. One of the most important parts of the morning is the opportunity for a cup of tea and a chat. Physical activity is extremely beneficial to mental wellbeing and for some just getting out of East Grinstead into a peaceful environment is very therapeutic. Recently two members of the group have become well enough to return to work. They had both said that the friendship and confidence that they gained from coming to the Group was instrumental in their recovery. It is these small successes that have helped make this project so worthwhile. This is another project that the Association runs in partnership. Springvale provide the transport, SOHA provide a specialist worker to accompany the Group and the Association provides a volunteer. They had recently successfully applied to the Healthy Mid Sussex project and been awarded a grant of £500 to help towards the costs of the project.

Mrs Dyer also told the meeting about Sunny Corner café. This community café officially opened in August 2008 and is a partnership between the Association, SOHA and West Sussex County Council. The Charity is fortunate to be able to use the kitchen and café area, which is located at the Glen Vue centre in Railway Approach, and which is open twice a week on Wednesdays and Fridays between 4.00pm and 7.00pm. Hot affordable meals and snacks are served with every customer receiving a warm welcome and introduction to others if wanted. One of the unexpected successes of this venture has been the growing number of volunteers wanting to work in the kitchen. The Association has funded food hygiene courses and first aid courses for them. They have also received grants from the Mid Sussex CLC for two years running to help fund equipment for the kitchen and these courses. The Association has a recovery worker at the café who has a full quota of 15 clients that she is seeing and there is a waiting list. She meets with these clients regularly and helps them with recovery programmes.

Mrs Dyer then went on to explain how the Charity is funded. She said that this year they are fortunate as they have been selected as the Mayors charity for the year and as a recipient also of funds from the East Grinstead branch of the Sorooptimists. They also apply to grant-giving bodies for funding, raise some directly themselves with two major fundraising events every year, and work closely in partnership with other local organisations to maximise the effectiveness of their small organisation. Furthermore she said that in the past they have facilitated an education and awareness programme into the 6th forms at Sackville and Imberhorne schools and are currently working on reinstating this for the next academic year. She very much appreciated that raising the profile of mental health is something that the Mayor would like to see targeted.

Mrs Dyer concluded by saying that mental health is not a popular subject and yet one in four people will be affected by mental health issues at some time in their lives. Stress and its related conditions are on the increase in our modern society and are the major cause of sickness leave today. She was sure that there is much more than can be done and many more people who could be reached but she was

confident that in a small way the Association is making a difference to lives of many of those afflicted with mental illness in the local community.

The Town Mayor then asked whether there were any questions and a number were asked. In response to a question as to how referrals are made to the Association for help Mrs Dyer said this is usually through the Community Psychiatric Nurse at Spring Vale. The Association can only assist those who are referred but in answer to another question she confirmed that the café at Glen Vue is open to everybody, whether referred or not. Furthermore, and in answer to a different question she said that someone in rehabilitation from mental illness but not referred should as a first step to having access to the Association's services, make themselves known at the café. They can then be referred on from there.

A questioner asked about how the Association can raise its profile locally and whether in addition to the talks to schools then are presentations to adult groups. Mrs Dyer said that generally there aren't the professional resources available for that. She said it would be good to have someone on board with real expertise in the subject who could do precisely that, preferably as a volunteer. The Association has previously provided a training session with professional input for the Queen Victoria Hospital NHS Foundation Trust and this had been well received. They would like to do more of that type of thing.

At the end of the question and answer session the Town Mayor thanked Mrs Dyer for her helpful and informative presentation. He added his own personal support for the work of the Association and asked the meeting to record its thanks in the usual way, which was duly responded to with genuine appreciation.

4 Chairmen's Reports for 2009/2010 Civic Year

The meeting received reports from the Chairmen of the Town Council's various programme committees on key aspects of the work of those Committees during the past civic year.

Planning Committee

Councillor Johnson, Chairman of Planning Committee made the following report:

.... "The Planning Committee has worked hard over the year and has considered over 300 applications, and has now settled into a three week cycle of meetings, following the drop in the number of applications received

While a high level of compliant decisions with those made by Mid Sussex District Council is being maintained, recently the Committee has had reason to make representation to the District Council because it has found that, in a few instances of officer delegated decisions, the Town Council's recommendations are not being taken into full consideration.

This year has seen the contentious redevelopment plans on the Dunnings Squash Club and Windmill Lane and Shovelstrode sites. Our members have to be vigilant in checking the information issued in reports by Mid Sussex Officers and by West Sussex Highways, where inaccuracies are occurring. With the reduction in staffing numbers, it increasingly falls to us to highlight breaches of conditions where they occur.

The Committee will be engaged once again in vigorously opposing an attempted move at District Council to scrap the three Area Planning Committees and revert to

the old two District-wide Committees, which would see councillors from all over the District determining our plans in East Grinstead, and our residents who wished to make representation at the Planning Committee having to travel to Haywards Heath rather than, as at present, to Turners Hill. Town's folk will be aware that this Town Council has always opposed such efforts to stifle local democracy.

Your Committee recognises the vulnerability of the District Council, having placed its Core Strategy progress on hold, and we are anxious that this leaves us open to piecemeal developments with no proper infrastructural measures in place, and we will be urging the District Council to get on with it! We face an interesting year ahead."

Public Services Committee

Councillor Mainstone, Chairman of the Public Services Committee made the following report:

"The purpose of the Public Services Committee is to consider services provided by other authorities and agencies and how they affect the town community

A feature of our meetings has been to invite speakers to explain to the committee how their services relate to East Grinstead. We have gained a lot of helpful information, we have asked a lot of questions and we have built a positive working relationship with several different service providers.

- Louise Hutchinson – Head of Patient Experience South East Coast ambulance Service National Health
- Alison Merriman – Assistant County Librarian WSCC
- Helen Watkin – General manager, Children and Family Services in West Sussex
- PCSO John Chisholm – Gatwick External Neighbourhood Policing Team
- Cllr Garry Wall – Cabinet Member for MSDC to hear from the committee about Car Parking in the town

I would also like to highlight the following agenda items that our committee have responded to on behalf of the Town Council:

- Non-adopted street lighting. Signing up to the upgrading and continuing maintenance of the Town Councils stock of lighting.
- Submission to the MSDC Parking Review 2010 – 2020
- East Grinstead Controlled Parking Zones Review
- East Grinstead railway Station rebuilding and development of the surrounding area
- Winter gritting and snow clearance in the town – the EGTC emergency action and long term strategy. Refuse and recycling collections during the difficult conditions
- Policing issues – Inspector Scott
- MSDC Choice based lettings
- Car Parking charges increased in April 2009
- School Safety Zones starting in 2011 for our local schools
- Queen Victoria Hospital echocardiograph
- Foot path at Rice's Hill

Finally I would like to thank Vice Chairman Cllr Gillbard and the Committee (Cllrs Mrs Bennett, Johnson, Quinn, Mrs Collins, Dixon, Joyce-Nelson, and Mrs Waddingham), the Town Mayor, Deputy Town Mayor, Council Leader and the Town Clerk for their interest and participation”.

Amenities and Tourism Committee

Councillor Musk, Chairman of Amenities & Tourism Committee, gave the following report:

“The Amenities and Tourism Committee is responsible for overseeing a broad range of the Town Council’s activities. These are:- East Grinstead in Bloom; Business Support; Tourism Support; Community Housekeeping; Estates Management, and Cemeteries and Burial Services.

The last year has been more active for this committee and the Town Council staff than any previous one. Difficult Economic trading conditions have meant that we have had to focus as never before to deliver best value for our town. Not just to deliver the expected services within the allocated budgets, but to raise the bar on ourselves and deliver new initiatives to the Town. At the same time we are becoming increasingly efficient, by finding innovative ways to manage the buildings and increasing the revenues that they can provide as well as managing the estate at large. I am pleased to summarise some of these initiatives below:-

- Highly successful outdoor Photographic exhibition.
- First time ever silver guilt award in East Grinstead in Bloom
- Silver Award for East Court estate (first ever entry)
- New Woodland Walkway created on East Court Estate
- First empty shop window decorated...more to follow
- Launched new East Grinstead “Champions” award.
- Redesigned tourist brochures.
- Highly successful tour guide walks
- Redesigned brochures for East Court and Meridian Hall
- Meridian Hall launched as a wedding venue...Acclaimed wedding exhibition held at Meridian Hall
- Employed handyman and apprentice for reduced cost/more control in maintaining the buildings. Decorated/Refurbished many rooms.
- Made significant input into MSDC Economic Development plans.
- Embarked on 10:10 Energy reduction campaign.
- Established working group to produce a forward thinking business plan to further increase our Estate revenues and alleviate tax pressures on our residents

In short we continue to move forward with verve and creativity at the same time as managing the business as usual of fixing boilers, broken windows, weeding twittens, managing the cemeteries etc. It has been an astounding year and my thanks go to all the hard working staff at East Grinstead Town Council”.

Finance & General Purposes Committee

Councillor Baldwin, Chairman of the Finance & General Purposes Committee made the following report:

“The year has seen further progress for F&GP in its dual roles of overseeing the Council’s finances and progressing wider organisational and governance aspects of its work. We are fortunate to have an experienced Committee and Council team

with sound foundations from our risk management and internal control processes. In terms of finance, I am grateful for the support of our Officers in allowing us to deliver a budget with a zero Council Tax rise.

We have done so with no black holes, no savage cuts and the protection of all the Council's priorities. This includes a further increase in the grants we give to a range of local organisations that contribute so much to the strength of our community - from the Credit Union, to Christmas Lights to East Grinstead in Bloom.

And we have set a similar target for next year.

This reflects prudent management of the Council's affairs in terms of close scrutiny on expenditure and the right policy decisions. In particular, I would stress the decision taken by this Administration to seek to boost income through an enhanced offer on our wedding and conference services.

The response of our Officers has again been superb, and they are now working with Members on a new Business Plan for the East Court Estate. This is led by Amenities and Tourism Committee but the outcomes of the Plan will impact fundamentally on the Council's finances. The Plan will take our policy on the Estate deeper and further than it's been before, with both short term considerations on charges and service levels and a much more fundamental vision for the longer term on the future for the Estate. Not only will this will have fundamental budgetary implications for the Council but it will also provide a key area of focus for the next Administration.

This Council has always been committed to winning more powers for itself and thereby the local community it serves. This policy area is driven by F&GP and we have set up a Working Group to prepare specific proposals. It is clear big changes are coming as the current three-tier approach is an expensive and inefficient mess; in short the 1974 local government settlement has not worked. We want East Grinstead to be at the forefront of the changes when they come as a proactive not a reactive Council.

In ensuring sound finances, a strong organisation and a continuing sense of future vision and purpose for the Council, F&GP is increasingly looking ahead to providing a strong platform for the next Administration and the challenges of change that undoubtedly lie ahead".

Charities Committee

Councillor Joyce-Nelson, Chairman of the Charities Committee presented the following report:

"The Charities Committee is independent of the Town Council and services the work of the Parish Halls Trust and Chequer Mead Community Arts Centre Trust. Every elected Member of the Town Council serves on this Committee as Trustees of the two charities.

The Parish Halls continue to be well used and income is on budget. Maintenance issues remain a concern. The long-term future of the Halls is under consideration and a report is expected shortly that will address their viability and the way forward for the coming years.

Chequer Mead has had another successful trading year against the backdrop of the national recession. Theatre bookings remain on target and the rooms at the Centre continue to be well used with regular and new hirers, particularly during late afternoon and evening periods. This year new double-glazed windows have been installed. The future maintenance requirements of the Centre will be extensive and there is a need to keep the building in condition. I am pleased that the new contract was negotiated with Cuisine Studio who will continue to provide the refreshments.

On behalf of the Trustees I must thank the staff, volunteers, Friends, Trading Company, caterers, those who serve on the Planning and Review Group and our many customers for their continuing support for this much needed and valued Community Arts Centre”

5 Public Questions and Discussions

There were no public questions from the floor.

The meeting closed at 8.24 p.m.

SIGNED:

TOWN MAYOR