



Put your hands up for a brighter, better Bexhill for us all!

Rother District Council has sent out leaflets to all Bexhill residents to ask AGAIN if they want a Bexhill town council. This is a historic moment for Bexhill, so please respond to the consultation. This leaflet will help you decide where you stand.

Please support a Bexhill town council

The Rother consultation runs until 3 April 2020 at 1630.

Please respond to Rother online at

www.bexhilltowncouncil.com

also see <http://rother.gov.uk/communitygovernancereview>

or write to Community Governance Review, Rother Town Hall, Bexhill, TN39 3JX,

(include your full address or your response won't be counted).

What's all this about?

Bexhill used to have its own borough council, founded in 1902. In 1974 it was abolished, and Rother District Council was created - large and mainly rural – in which Bexhill residents do not have direct control over decisions about the town. Following new powers given to town councils in the Localism Act 2011, towns up and down the UK formed their own councils. Concerned residents here felt that Bexhill town was missing out, and in 2017 after a 3 year campaign by D4B, Rother had to ask for everyone's views on local governance. Over 9,000 people responded: 93.5% of whom wanted a town council. But Rother said no. Most of the new Rother councillors stood for election on the promise of supporting a town council for Bexhill residents, and they won by a landslide. However, by law they have to ask us AGAIN.

Cost of a Bexhill town council

There has been a lot of nonsense and scaremongering about the cost.

- The extra cost to you would initially be 14p a week (£7.50 a year) for Band D households, and less for lower tax bands. This is Rother's estimate of the basic costs of a Bexhill town council, with a qualified town clerk; insurance and subscriptions; an office; and two other staff. The town council, if agreed in July 2020 and elected in May 2021, is likely to assess residents' views, identify priorities, raise money from outside bodies for specific projects, and set them in motion.
- The town council may also take over some of Rother's services to protect them against cuts. Residents in Band D already pay Rother about £37 per year in the tax called Bexhill Special Expenses, for some of Bexhill's parks, allotments, the museum and other services. If the town council negotiated to take over those services, the cost to you should be the same as now. Rother's 5-year budget shows the income from Special Expenses falling to zero when the town council is created in 2021/2022. The result: a total tax paid to Bexhill Town Council, of £44.50, £37 of which you already pay now. People in Bands A, B and C pay less and those on low incomes and/or benefits can get up to an 80% reduction, depending on their circumstances.
- Town councils also initiate new services and can raise the tax to provide them. Some towns involve their residents in "approving" their planned budgets before they decide. The average precept for a town council in the UK is £57, but local taxes vary a lot depending on the population, house values and services provided. Bexhill is large, which reduces costs per head. You can elect councillors based on their plans.
- So, unlike big councils like Rother the local tax can go up and it is not capped. This is because the government decided that if a parish or town wanted to introduce or "save" a nursery or library, buy a field, a community hall or renovate a war memorial, they could raise the money to do so without holding an expensive referendum. Every penny raised by the town council is spent locally. Town councillors are usually unpaid and not keen on long meetings, stupid bureaucracy or waste.

Town councils also raise money for specific projects from outside sources; invest in the town; generate “community wealth”; or earn money from commercial activities such as running a golf course or event venues. They can also gain from sponsorship, build to create an income stream, and gain from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) paid by developers.

What do town councils do?

Town councils can do almost anything that is legal and affordable. They work on those issues big and small which the bigger councils do not have the time or resources to prioritise. They aim to bring back pride in the town, sort out things which residents notice and care about, and save services at risk from cuts. They concentrate on the needs of the town and engage with local people and organisations about their priorities, and what innovations are needed to make a difference to Bexhill. Some examples include:

- more trees in your streets, flower tubs and litter teams;
- a community cinema;
- a grotbuster team to improve open spaces and buildings;
- a town steward to keep the streets looking good;
- a health and sunshine project to help young and old keep fit;
- attracting different shops to revitalize shopping streets;
- a permanent tourist office;
- a space for meetings, rehearsals
- a crime prevention project;
- a table-tennis hub for young people;
- increased help for community groups and charities;
- attracting rented affordable housing reserved for locals;
- “park and stride” scheme;
- electric car sharing and charging points;
- town events and festivals;
- loneliness projects;
- “Happy to Chat” benches.
- An under 12s bike or skate park
- saving services threatened with cuts by Rother or East Sussex.

We all know that Bexhill must not lose its charm, but it could do with smartening up; more money coming in; fewer empty shops; more for kids to do; more fun; more and cheaper housing; and more for families and older people, particularly those living alone.

Town councils also target and negotiate with services run by others which need improvement such as uneven pavements, street lighting, potholes, or the bus services. Most town councils are the smallest, most inexpensive layer of governance and often involve volunteers in helping to get things done.

Keep Bexhill special

Central government funding has been more than halved in the last decade. Rother and East Sussex will be making more cuts. Unless Bexhill has its own town council, these cuts could take a heavy toll. Only a town council can fight for Bexhill and raise money from such a wide range of sources – as well as harnessing the skills and experience of local people and organisations to support our town. Rother's new councillors are fighting hard to make improvements. But they are only elected for four years and if Bexhill does not have a town council now, there is no guarantee that future Rother councillors will not try to turn the clock back.

But Rother and East Sussex continue to do their job?

Yes. Having a town council in Bexhill will not change the wider roles of Rother or East Sussex, although both of them are making cuts. They have some statutory obligations which cannot be shared, for example, planning decisions. But by law, the views of a town council have to be taken into account in planning, particularly if the council has involved Bexhill residents in creating a Neighbourhood Plan, which gives the town council the right to 25% of the Community Infrastructure Levy paid by developers. (compared to 15% without a neighbourhood plan).

Could I stand as a town councillor?

Probably, yes! – please consider if you or someone you know would make a good town councillor. When the elections come round in May 2021, the people of Bexhill will need to elect people of all ages with skills, vision and ambition for the town, able to listen, learn and get things done at minimum cost. D4B will help to arrange support and training for people who might consider being a councillor.

Bexhill deserves its own town council - to get things done.

You have until 4.30 pm on 3 April 2020 to have your say. Please go to:

www.Bexhilltowncouncil.com

or write to Community Governance Review, Rother Town Hall, Bexhill, TN39 3JX

(Don't forget to include your address or your response will not be counted) Thank you.