

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

WAR MEMORIAL RAILINGS SCRUTINY PANEL

10.00AM – 1ST SEPTEMBER 2003

BRIGHTON TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Kevin Allen (Chair); Councillors Mrs Dee Simson, Simon Williams

Also Present: Councillors Simon Burgess, Averil Older and Geoffrey Theobald

Ten members of the public.

Officers: Peter Wickson (Senior Contracts Officer), Mary van Beinum (Committee Administrator).

PART ONE

ACTION

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, introduced the Panel Members and outlined the background to the scrutiny review, which had been initiated by a request from Councillor Geoffrey Theobald.

1.2 The Panel's remit is 'to make recommendations on possible action to be taken with regard to the request for higher railings around the war memorial in the Steine.' The scrutiny findings and recommendations would be reported to the parent Committee, the Overview and Scrutiny Organisation Committee on 17th November. The Panel does not have the power to make decisions. The scrutiny recommendations would be considered by the Environment Committee and reported together with the Environment Committee's reply to a meeting of the full Council.

1.3 The Panel had already heard from council officers and Members. This public meeting had been arranged particularly to hear the views of people with a close interest in the war memorial. A file of correspondence had been circulated to all those who had been in contact with the Panel.

1.4 The Panel chair invited the members of the public and the councillors to put forward their views.

2. INFORMATION FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

2.1 Mr Tony Sullivan said he was speaking on behalf of Mr Clarke the Chairman of the Combined Ex-Services Association and Royal British Legion who unfortunately could not be at the meeting. He said that despite the inscription on the memorial 'lest we forget' he felt that many people in Brighton including successive Councillors had indeed forgotten those who gave their lives in conflicts. The war memorial was not generally regarded with the dignity it deserved, he said and raising the height of the railings would help to restore the dignity of the memorial.

2.2 Mr Sullivan fully supported Mr Steven's remarks, which were included in the file of correspondence. But he said the file included a stupid remark at page 38; that a higher fence would create more rubbish. He strongly disagreed with the views of another correspondent (p15 of the file) and said he and his colleagues were not asking for the memorial to be closed off. On the contrary, it should be accessible for people to be able to pay their respects.

2.3 The views of people who do not know the significance of the memorial, ought to be disregarded, he said and many people were unaware that the water represented the Merchant Navy and the Royal Navy and the memorial gardens represented the British Army and Royal Air Force.

2.4 Brighton's monument was the finest on the South Coast and was in remembrance of the fallen, not only of World War One but also of subsequent conflicts around the world. The City should feel honoured to have the memorial at its centre, and not denigrate it.

2.5 The existing fence was much too low. A higher fence of either 36 inches or 48 inches would help to show that both the garden and pond areas should be properly respected by everyone. The higher railings would still allow for the annual parade and for the grounds maintenance staff to do their work.

2.6 Mr Sullivan had seen people leaving litter and drinks cans in the garden and said if anyone was in doubt about this, they should take a closer look at how the area was treated.

2.7 More Councillors should be involved in the annual parade, he said.

2.8 Asked by the Panel for his views on improving signage at the memorial Mr Sullivan said he would like to see better signs but he did not think other languages were necessary. Signs at memorials in other countries included only the indigenous language. However he would not object to other languages. A new commemoration

plaque was being added at the centre.

2.9 Mrs Harriott, who served in the RAF said the fence was much too low; she or anyone else could step over it very easily; she had had to remove a man who was washing his dog in the pool, where the water represents the Royal Navy.

2.10 The area around the memorial was disgusting this morning, she said. It was disgusting that people left rubbish behind and used the area as a public toilet; this did not happen at the Whitehall cenotaph where respect was shown for those who gave their lives in World War One and in 20 other conflicts since then.

2.11 The Panel Chair said this could be an opportunity to increase public awareness of the significance of the memorial and what it stood for.

2.12 Councillor Theobald said he was a member of the Royal British Legion (Brighton Branch). He reassured the meeting that the Panel would listen carefully to the views being put forward. He had spoken to Mr Clarke who unfortunately was unable to be at the meeting because of a hospital appointment. Mr Clarke had only recently had to move people behaving disrespectfully and their dogs, out of the area of the memorial. Councillor Theobald said that at least 80% of people in the city and visitors, probably do not properly understand all the various aspects of the memorial nor what the different parts represent.

2.13 Raising the railings seemed the obvious step to help preserve the memorial for the sake of all those who lost their lives in wars. A relatively trivial sum of money was involved and he felt that the time and effort already expended in the growing amount of correspondence and the time spent on this matter has already outweighed the cost of any new railings.

2.14 Councillor Theobald said he was delighted to be able to hear the views of his friends and colleagues, including other Councillors. He thanked everyone participating in the review especially those who had sent written information to the Panel.

2.15 Mr Leonard Stafford asked ' What is a war memorial?' and said it was not a trivial question. As many as 2,397 names were engraved on the memorial and those lost in World War Two were listed in a book in St Peter's Church, including 242 names from his own service, the Royal Air Force. A further 965 were denoted by a tablet in memory of the fallen during World War Two and subsequent conflicts

2.16 Mr Clarke had seen graffiti on the memorial, which had now

been removed, said Mr Stafford.

2.17 Mr Stafford put forward to the Panel his points of view – see his letter pp7 – 9 of the file of correspondence.

2.18 The Panel agreed with Mr Stafford, that the style of fencing to the north of St Peter's Church may well be considered appropriate for use around the war memorial to prevent people stepping over too easily.

2.19 Asked about the cleaning and tidying of the area, Mr Sullivan said some parts of the memorial were completely covered by bird droppings. The pigeon deterrent spikes had all but disappeared and so were ineffective, he said.

2.20 Some parts of the fencing had been taken down, but he did not know why.

2.21 Councillor Theobald said some while ago a lady fed pigeons every day at the war memorial and had been asked to do this somewhere else (if at all.)

2.22 The Scrutiny Panel Chair said that there seemed to be a difference of opinion about the number of incidents and the extent of vandalism and misuse of the memorial site. However that any single incident was a cause of major offence to many people.

2.23 The Scrutiny Panel asked what suggestions for improvements there may be to help bring alive the monument in the consciousness of people who don't realise its significance, especially young people and tourists.

2.24 Mr Sullivan suggested a push-button system of recorded information, though this may be prone to vandalism and graffiti.

2.25 Mr Stafford said it would be better if the memorial could be kept looking nice. Higher railings would mean the memorial would be less prone to vandalism.

2.26 Major Maitland Sions commented that more people were attending the Remembrance Day ceremony every year and the numbers of distinguished visitors from abroad was also rising steadily. The City Events Officer was taking this aspect very seriously and should be fully supported in this work. The Council needed to do all it could to help prevent any problems at the memorial.

2.27 Mr Stafford said the memorial could be illuminated at night; this may also help deter vandalism.

2.28 Mrs Harriott said space would be needed for loved ones to place crosses, but flowerbeds would have a very positive impact. Not only would they be very attractive, but people would be less inclined to jump over the fence into flowers

2.29 Mr Stevens, a representative of the National Ex-Servicemen's Association, addressed the meeting. He had been involved in extending the local 'no drinking' ban to the area of the war memorial. He said it was important to remember that we are lucky to have human rights and to be living in a democracy - those who had fought for this should be remembered.

2.30 Better signage should explain the significance of the memorial. Schools could be asked to contribute information and talks could be given to children by ex-service men and women. The children needed to understand that the memorial is a war grave and should be treated in the same way that a relative's grave would be respected.

2.31 He described the state of the war memorial as 'disgusting' and a 'disgrace.' There was litter and the water was murky. He felt the monument should be the first priority every day for the staff responsible for cleaning.

2.32 Mr Stevens had done some research and discovered that the inscribed names in memory of those killed in World War One were incomplete. Three brothers, lost within three days of each other had been omitted for example. The supplementary list included 254 further names and this should be looked into.

2.33 Mr Stevens specially wanted to thank Chris Coomber of the reference library who had helped in his research; also the Council officers, Councillor Theobald who had raised the matter for scrutiny, the ex- Servicemen and women, Members of the Panel and the Members giving evidence at the meeting.

2.34 Although the names can be viewed in a book held within St Peter's church, it was not clear to visitors how to get to the church nor how to gain access when the church doors are locked.

2.35 He said Councillors were in charge of maintaining the memorial and more needed to be done.

2.36 The Chair of the Panel asked what contact there was between the council and ex-Services Associations as regards arrangements for routine maintenance of the memorial and heard that there was apparently none. It was suggested that closer working contacts would be helpful in building a constructive long-

term system of liaison.

2.37 Mr Copelin, Chair of Patcham Royal British Legion says he regularly checked the Patcham war memorial and the Chattri and he contacts the Senior Contracts Officer with any problems.

2.38 Councillor Theobald said a council officer does attend a meeting of the Combined Ex-Services Association for planning the annual Remembrance Parade. However his responsibilities did not extend to maintenance and cleaning issues. This had proved very frustrating in the past so liaison meetings would be useful.

2.39 Mr Copelin said this was the only war memorial in the country with railings only 18 inches high. Most others have railings 3 feet, or 3 feet 6 inches, high with a gate for maintenance and for the Remembrance ceremony. Edinburgh had a poppy arch leading into the garden of remembrance which would be a suggestion for Brighton.

2.40 Mr Sullivan said the public were generally unaware of the garden of remembrance and the meaning of the standards placed there in the week before the parade. He was also grateful to Councillor Older who had expressed her concern about the mess caused by pigeons.

2.41 Mr Potton, Chairman of the Burma Star, Member of CESA and the Royal British Legion, said in his view most Councillors thought the memorial was only the white stone building, whereas the whole area is part of the memorial with the grassy part being the Garden of Remembrance.

2.42 The ground was consecrated on the Thursday prior to Armistice Day by the Canon of Brighton and the Mayor of Brighton and Hove. If new railings were erected, there should also be a notice indicating this is a Garden of Remembrance.

2.43 Referring to the file of correspondence, Mr Potton listed further letters that he felt should be added to the file as evidence to the scrutiny panel; the Committee Administrator would arrange this.

MvB

2.44 He said he strongly disagreed with those who did not want the railings to be raised in height; their views were based on issues of cost, visual impact and personal observation

2.45 The costs, he said were miniscule in comparison with some other projects around the City which in his view were of less consequence. If a relatively small sum of money could not be found this would be an insult to those who made the sacrifice which enabled the Councillors to be in the position they held today in a

democratic system.

2.46 Remarks made about the visual impact of higher railings were risible; people in Brighton were not 6 inch dwarfs as seemed to be implied.

2.47 There was always rubbish all over the place, so anyone who disagreed with this must be observing only very rarely.

2.48 Mr Potton said as a member of the Royal Scots regiment he attended a presentation of colours by Princess Anne. He said people from Brighton would be astonished to see the memorial gardens in Princes Street kept spotless, which were a credit to Edinburgh. No one could say that Brighton's war memorial was a credit to this City, in his view.

2.49 Asked about the best height for the railings, Mr Potton said 3 feet 6 inches would be appropriate. Flowers would also be very welcome; it was usual for memorials to have floral areas. As regards education, Mr Potton agreed with the suggestions already made regarding links with schools and teachers. He had seen interpretation boards elsewhere and felt they would also be very good idea as a way of setting out the history of the memorial and its meaning.

2.50 Mr Stafford agreed that anything that helps to educate the public would be welcome.

2.51 Mr Sullivan said he did not think modern history was properly taught in schools. Any interpretation board would need to be placed carefully and designed to deter vandalism.

2.52 It was suggested that Poppy Day would be a good opportunity to give out leaflets to children to take to school and the press including the City News should be asked to publish front page articles. There were many interesting stories showing the bravery of servicemen and women. Leaflets to schools could perhaps be sent via the Council's courier service.

2.53 Mr Stafford had contacted former Minister for Education Jack Straw who reassured him that the Battle of Britain was indeed part of the teaching syllabus.

2.54 Councillor Older felt that a City News article on the War Memorial would be helpful. Also, all Councillors should be asked to attend the Remembrance Day ceremony.

2.55 She was concerned that pigeons were attracted to the

memorial by people feeding them there, the bird deterrent spikes were almost non-existent and bird droppings had not been removed for a very long time.

2.56 An interpretation board was a good idea she said. It could be sited not directly behind the memorial structure but by the walkway between the pool and the fountain, where most people walked.

2.57 A higher fence with flowers would be a mental marker, rather than a total physical barrier. Night-time illumination would be attractive and help deter vandals. Councillor Older felt that the Council spent money on less significant projects which in comparison with the war memorial could be regarded as a waste of money.

2.58 Mr Potton said the war memorial would be subject to good publicity when a new granite slab is dedicated in the near future; this would be a good opportunity to raise the profile of the memorial.

2.59 He referred to the new Kohima Memorial, bearing the inscription; "When You Go Home, Tell Them Of Us And Say, For Your Tomorrow, We Gave Our Today"

2.60 Councillor Burgess said he appreciated hearing the views expressed at the meeting. He said that Remembrance Sunday was for him the most moving day of the year and he agreed that the Brighton war memorial was the most impressive on the South Coast. The meeting had heard how little is probably known about the meaning of the war memorial and he personally wished that more people could attend the remembrance day parade and experience the feeling of the occasion and the period of silence in the centre of a busy city.

2.61 Councillor Burgess (also Deputy Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee) said he was speaking as a local councillor. He felt that the memorial should be 150% looked after. Council Officers may feel that it is OK in comparison with other parts of the City, but the memorial is for those who made the ultimate sacrifice and it ought to be immaculate. A place could be judged by how it treats its war memorial and it was in his view a shame that more had not been done before in this area. He could not see why that should be the case.

2.62 He told the meeting that railings would be relatively inexpensive and easy to arrange; similarly for interpretation boards and some other ideas that had been brought forward. 'You have some pretty overwhelming evidence in front of you' he said.

2.63 Councillor Older said the first step would be to turn the

remembrance garden into a real garden. She was reminded of the memorial at Bosham, surrounded by cobblestones which read 'When memory falls forgotten, remembrance shall remain.'

2.64 The Senior Contracts Officer asked if those present would prefer the pool to be painted blue, if that could be done. The general response from the meeting was in agreement; the natural green colouration was regarded as unattractive and blue would reflect, appropriately, the blue of the sea.

2.65 Mr Stevens asked whether the area could be cleaned more frequently and whether rubbish bins could be added near the bus shelters to help reduce litter in the area.

2.66 Mr Sullivan re-iterated the view that many people, including some Councillors were unaware of the significance of the memorial and asked if the Panel would be able to inform Councillors about what it represents.

2.67 The meeting heard that attention was needed at the Hove memorial in Kings Avenue and the replacement of removed turf at the Brighton memorial. The senior Contracts Officer undertook to investigate.

2.68 Councillor Theobald thanked the Scrutiny Panel on behalf of the Ex-services men and women

2.69 The Scrutiny Panel Chair thanked all the participants to the review. All the views would be taken into account. Draft notes would be circulated to confirm they were a correct record of the proceedings and a copy of the Panel's draft report would also be distributed.

PART TWO

3. ITEMS TO REMAIN EXEMPT FROM DISCLOSURE TO THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

3.1 **RESOLVED** - That no items remain exempt from disclosure to the press and public.

The meeting concluded at 12.10pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

2003