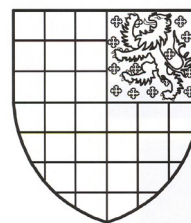


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**LEWES
TOWN
COUNCIL**

MINUTES

of the **Devolution Working Party** held on **Friday 29th November 2019**, in the **Council Chamber, Town Hall, Lewes** at **11:00am**.

PRESENT Cllrs Burrows; Catlin; Dr Mayhew, and Wood

In attendance: S Brigden (*Town Clerk [TC]*) Cllr R O’Keeffe (*as Lewes District Council Lead Member for Devolution & Tourism*).

DevWP2019/01 ELECTION of CHAIRMAN:

Cllr Dr Mayhew was elected as Chair of the Working Party for the 2019/20 municipal year

DevWP2019/02 QUESTIONS: There were none at this point.

DevWP2019/03 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Apologies had been received from Cllr Earl, who was unwell, and Cllr Henman who had a work commitment.

DevWP2019/04 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST: Cllr Burrows declared his role as Secretary of Lewes Priory Cricket Club (*iro* any discussions re Stanley Turner Trust).

DevWP2019/05 EXCLUSION of the PRESS & PUBLIC

As this Working Party would discuss details related to proposed contract negotiations; the Chairman moved, and **it was resolved that:**

DevWP2019/05.1 “That in view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted during the remainder of the meeting - which is detail related to proposed contracts; pursuant to the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 s1(2); any members of the press or public present be excluded and instructed to withdraw”

DevWP2019/06 REMIT of the PANEL:

It was noted that the Working Party was tasked with oversight of negotiations with Lewes District Council regarding devolution of local assets or services.

DevWP2019/07 BUSINESS OF THE MEETING:

- 1 Members considered a report (*DevWp001/2019, copy in the Minute Book*) that provided the Town Council’s history with regard to devolution; an update on the current status, and indications of future prospects. Appended to this were copies of a recent Lewes District Council (LDC) Cabinet report and associated revised Policy on property disposal and transfer. Also provided was a briefing note describing transfers to the Town Council by LDC since 1995, and descriptions of improvements introduced since acquisition.
- 2 The Town Council had registered requests, in June 2018, for the terms under which it might acquire ownership of LDC’s redundant premises at No.2 Fisher Street, Lewes, and also the market Tower, Market Street, Lewes. LDC had also been asked to consider terms upon which the Town Council might assume the Trusteeship of the Convent Field Trust, including the off-street carpark, and the Town Council had indicated that it may be interested to assume the Trusteeship of the Stanley Turner Trust in a future tranche of devolution.
- 3 LDC had indicated freehold values for the two buildings which could form the basis of a discussion. Working Party Members were encouraged that the recently revised LDC property disposal policy now gave appropriate recognition to principles of community asset transfer and the long-standing statutory “general

Consent” (*Circular 06/03: Local Government Act 1972 general disposal consent [England] 2003*) which allowed disposal of property for up to £2M less than its valuation.

- 4 It was explained that the terms of this mean that specific Ministerial consent is not required for the disposal of any interest in land which LDC considers will “help it to secure the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of its area”. LDC should also have regard to their community strategy and could rely upon the well-being criteria in the Local Government Act 2000 when considering disposals at less than best value. It was for LDC to agree on such decisions, but disposal at less than best value was possible provided that the undervalue does not exceed £2,000,000 (two million pounds).
- 5 Transfer of Trusteeship was a straightforward matter, and it was understood that LDC had obtained an opinion from the Charity Commissioners indicating that they would not see it necessary to impose any conditions or complexity such as a Commissioners’ Scheme or Order, but the two parties were able to simply agree legal transfer. With regard to the Stanley Turner ground; the resident sports clubs had long held aspirations to independently manage the maintenance of the playing surfaces and facilities and had expressed hopes that this might be agreed under LTC trusteeship. There were several questions related to the Convent Field: the precise boundaries were not known, and LDC’s position regarding the off-street carpark and status of Lewes Football Club were issues that would need to be established.
- 6 The Working Party discussed these matters at some length, and several practical questions arose as to the future management of any acquisitions and wider concerns such as staff resources and accommodation. It was acknowledged that further acquisition of open spaces would eventually reach a tipping-point where direct employment of dedicated staff would be advantageous, but in the immediate future there were considerations such as the need to recognize the existing LDC contract for grounds maintenance.

DevWP2019/08

CONCLUSIONS:

The following agreements were reached, for recommendation to Council:

- > *Market Tower and No.2 Fisher Street* – Council should indicate an agreement in-principle to proceed with acquisition of freehold title, subject to further detailed negotiations, notably regarding community value and future use.
- > *Stanley Turner Trust* – Council should indicate an agreement in-principle to proceed with a transfer of Trusteeship, and simultaneously ask the ‘resident’ sports clubs to prepare their case for a future independent management agreement. LDC should be commissioned to continue as manager of day-to-day operations in the short term, under an agreement similar to that concluded regarding Landport Bottom.
- > *Convent Field* - Council should indicate an agreement in-principle to a transfer of Trusteeship, but subject to consideration of further detail regarding aspects such as the status of Lewes FC and the off-street carpark; that consideration to be in the short term.

DevWP2019/09

There being no further business, the Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and declared the meeting closed.

The meeting closed at 12:40pm

Signed date