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**LEWES  
TOWN  
COUNCIL**

## *MINUTES*

Of the meeting of **Lewes Town Council** held on  
**Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2014**, in the **Council Chamber, Town Hall, Lewes** at **7:30pm**.

*NB if a record of voting was requested, this is shown in a table appended to these Minutes.*

**PRESENT:** Councillors L Allsobrook; S Catlin (Wischhusen); M Chartier; J Daly; J Lamb; D Lamport; L F Li (*Deputy Mayor*); G Mayhew; R Murray; S Murray; R O’Keeffe; A Price; J Stockdale and Dr M Turner (*Mayor*)

*In attendance:* S Bridgen (*Town Clerk [TC]*); Mrs F Garth (*Civic Officer & Asst. Town Clerk*); L Symons (*Mace Bearer*); Mrs E Tingley (*C’tee Administration*)

*Observing:* Mr B Courage (*Town Ranger*); Ms J Dean (*Customer Services Officer*); Ms V McLachlan (*Finance Administration Officer*)

**FC2014/75** **QUESTION TIME:** No questions were asked. One member of the public present.

**FC2014/76** **MEMBERS’ DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** Cllr S Catlin declared an interest *iro* item 5a (Grants Panel recommendations) in that he is Chairman of the Phoenix Talking Post, Cllr E Allsobrook declared an interest *iro* item 9 (Neighbourhood Plan Consultant) in that one of the prospective contractors who submitted a tender was her previous employer and Cllr R O’Keeffe declared an interest *iro* item 5a (Grants Panel recommendations) in that she was a member of several of the applicant bodies.

**FC2014/77** **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Apologies had been received from Cllrs J MacCleary and M Milner who had work commitments. There had been no message from Cllrs A Dean or I Eiloart.

**FC2014/78** **MAYOR’S ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

- a) The Mayor informed Members of the death of Gladys Yarrow who had been Mayoress to Reg Yarrow, Mayor of the Borough in 1960 – 1961 – 1962 and 1969 – 1970 and the Mayor of the Town in 1984 – 1985. Mrs Yarrow had made a great contribution to the town: running the 1<sup>st</sup> Lewes Cubs throughout the 1950’s; assisting at Round Table events; Town Twinning; Poppy Day collections; serving at the House of Friendship and much more. Details of the funeral arrangements had been circulated.
- b) The Mayor announced that Emma Tingley would record 20 years’ service to the Town Council on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2015. Lee Symons would mark his 20<sup>th</sup> year at the Town Hall in March 2015. Both were congratulated and thanked for their loyal service.
- c) A Civic Carol Concert would be held at 7.30pm on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> December 2014 at St Anne’s Church; with carols by candlelight followed by homemade mince pies and wine.
- d) The Mayor’s Christmas Dinner would be held on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> December at 6.30pm in the Council Chamber.
- e) Lewes Concert Orchestra would be giving a Christmas Concert in the Assembly Room in the Town Hall on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> December at 7.30pm.

*Continues...*

f) An East Sussex County Council survey on countryside access and Rights of Way was appended to the Agenda. Responses were requested online and Cllr S Murray volunteered to collate comments from Members and submit them.

g) Lewes, Glynde and Beddingham Brass Band would be hosting a quiz night on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2015.

FC2014/79

#### **MINUTES:**

The Minutes of the Council meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014 were received and signed as an accurate record.

FC2014/80

#### **WORKING PARTIES AND OUTSIDE BODIES:**

*Members are reminded that anyone who may have attended a meeting of any recognized outside body which has covered issues that deserve attention by the Council, should ensure that TC is aware of this before the Council's next meeting, and preferably before the agenda deadline. Reports on all activities of the organization are not expected.*

**a]** *Grants Panel 26<sup>th</sup> November 2014:* Members considered Report FC011/2014 (*Copy in minute book*) containing the Panel's recommendations for payment of grants for the third (of four) cycle of the year. Following one or two questions on detail, **it was resolved that:**

**FC2014/80.1** Grant payments recommended in Column G of the appendix to Report FC011/2014 (*Copy in minute book*) be approved

**b]** *Finance Working Party meeting 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2014:* The working party had examined the detail of estimated expenditure and income for the Council's operations, and recommended a budget and level of Council Tax precept for the 2015/16 year, having made appropriate provision for items to form the Council Plan for 2015/16.

There was a continuing lack of clarity over the Government's intentions for capping Council Tax increases, with no formal announcement made for 2015/16.

In the year of introduction (2013/14) of the Government's Council Tax Support Grant scheme, Lewes District Council had passed-on the whole amount which had been sufficient to maintain the Town Council's band 'D' precept unchanged. However; this was reduced for 2014/15 by £15,737 (18%), and was to reduce again by £11,030 (15%) for 2015/16 (and reduce to nil at some point in the near future). The Town Council (LTC) therefore faced an enforced increase to precept to simply maintain budgeted nett expenditure at the present level.

The Working Party had considered the service budget estimates for 2015/16 (*copies in the minute book*). The assumptions and basic principles applied in compiling the proposed budget had been commended by the Council's independent auditor, who stated: "*I would go so far as to say the budgeting process at the council is a model of clarity and a good model for other councils*". Various adjustments had been made to accommodate the agreed acceptance of parks and open spaces devolved from Lewes District Council, and other items resolved by Council. Budgets had been drafted to take account of :

- Provision for known/anticipated increases in public Utility supplies, NNDR *etc.*
- Adjustments for completed and imminent (previously-approved) projects.
- Provision for elements identified in the Council's forward plan.
- Establishment of appropriate reserves for anticipated projects.
- Provision for anticipated increases in insurance and other overhead costs *etc.*
- Provision for known increase in employers' pension contribution.
- Refinements of overhead allocation to services and base service cost estimates.
- Recognition of anticipated adjustment to salaries.
- Provision for known and anticipated increases in cost of contracted services.
- Re-establishment of exhausted reserves and continuation of prudent contributions.

- Provision for costs of assets or services accepted through devolution by Lewes District Council, and for necessary transitional costs.
- Fees & charges tariff increase of 3%, rounded to an appropriate value for the service concerned.

It was acknowledged that there was a continuing need to address the proper maintenance of the Council's physical assets and adequately fund continuing services.

The draft budget combined specific amounts for known costs and committed project items, with prudent allowances for reserves, and provided for a flexible response to any devolution proposals. Following several years with no growth this had been achieved with only a modest £4,000 increase in estimated nett expenditure, equal to less than half of one percent. To offset the reduced support grant necessitated a further increase; giving a precept increase of £15,030 – equal to 2%. Most of the reserves earmarked for the Council's significant service and project requirements were considered suitably robust and adequate to fulfil their purpose.

The Council's forward plan was considered, and it was understood that this involved significant burden on the Council's existing staff and resources, and was as expansive as could be practically undertaken. Members had recognized that some projects could exceed original "informed guess" estimates of cost, and earmarked reserves could be insufficient. Building and engineering works were of particular concern in this regard, as the Council's assets had all been taken-on with considerable historic dilapidation, and contexts such as heritage listing status. It was considered that there was no other organization in a position to offer appropriate support for such as the Town Hall; All Saints Centre; Malling Community Centre or the Pells, which were such important and well-used local community assets. Projects could be "topped-up" by drawing from the General Fund which; although adequate, would then need to be restored in future years to the levels recommended by government auditors.

With these issues in mind, a forward plan was submitted, and it was proposed that Council approve the operational service budgets as presented, and to choose between two options for the level of precept – either the value of a 2% increase, or a 4% increase; allowing for an additional £15,000 contribution to the reserve earmarked for the (imminent) refurbishment of the Town Hall.

After some discussion and consideration of alternative points-of-view, **it was resolved that** (*a recorded vote was requested, a record of which is appended to these minutes*):

**FC2014/80.2** The budgets for estimated operational service expenditure and income for the 2015/16 financial year; as recommended by the Finance Working Party following its meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2014 (*Copies in minute book*), be approved.

**FC2014/80.3** The total sum to be raised by precept on council tax for 2015/16 be set at £780,496 when anticipated Council Tax Support Grant of £62,504 is accounted-for. (To service a nett requirement of £843,000).

**FC2014/80.4** The Council Plan for 2015/16 proposed by the Finance Working Party following its meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2014 (*Copy in minute book*), is approved.

**c]** *Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (LNPSG) meeting 8<sup>th</sup> December 2014:* Cllr Turner reported that a sub-group of the LNPSG had been tasked with overseeing a tender for commission of a managing Consultant. Seventeen expressions of interest were received, although only five organizations submitted bids. These had been analysed, with 70% bias towards qualitative criteria and 30% towards cost. Three prospective consultants were interviewed and panellists were unanimous in recommending one. Council would be asked to agree this recommendation following consideration of further details later in the meeting (agenda item 9). **It was resolved that:**

**FC2014/80.5** The report of the meeting of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group held on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2014 is noted.

d] *Lewes & Seaford Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)*: Cllr Catlin reported that a new five year lease had been signed on the property where CAB is based. Weekly outreach clinics were also being held at Southover House where clients could be put directly in contact with benefits advisers. In their second quarter 60 clients had attended CAB from Bridge Ward, 62 from Castle Ward and 53 from Priority Ward. There was a notable presence from age groups 20-24yrs and 60-64. The subject that caused most concern was debt. CAB had obtained financial help during that quarter totalling £32,764 from various agencies to help their clients.

After some discussion **it was resolved that:**

**FC2014/80.6** The report on Lewes & Seaford Citizens Advice Bureau is noted.

e] *Request by Cllr Lamb to be appointed to the Buildings Working Party dealing with Town Hall and Malling Community Centre refurbishment:*

**It was resolved that:**

**FC2014/80.7** Cllr Lamb be appointed to the Working Party dealing with refurbishment projects at the Town Hall and Malling Community Centre.

**FC2014/81**

#### **UPDATE ON MATTERS IN PROGRESS:**

a) *North Street Quarter/Pells* – The North Street Quarter Board Meeting had been deferred and would be held on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2014. The Santon/LDC planning application submission was expected in January.

b) *Building repairs/refurbishment* –. A preliminary ‘order of costs’ report had been received from surveyors *in* the Town Hall. This formed a basis for the detailed specification that would be put out to tender in January, allowing a month for businesses interested in pricing for the work to bid; with tenders being assessed in March and work being undertaken in May, with an anticipated duration of around 20 weeks. Pre-application discussions with the district Conservation Officer and English Heritage had raised no points of concern, and it was anticipated that the significance of the building would make the project interesting to a number of specialist contractors. It was encouraging that the original informed estimates of cost following the first close-quarters inspection had proved reasonably accurate compared with the latest professional costing exercise, although the more detailed later survey (including penetrative investigations and laser scanning) had uncovered significant and substantial additional defects which increased the likely cost. More would be known following the specification and tender stages.

c) *‘Our Pictures’ project* – Two meetings had been held with volunteers, and there was significant interest and support for the research and for a long-term legacy of improved access and curation of the pictures. Two preliminary estimates had been received for the restoration of the pictures, which differed significantly. These were being carefully assessed with the help of expert advice, and the effect on the level of potential Lottery grant funding evaluated.

d) *Tree Surveys* – Love Lane tree belt had been surveyed and it was understood that there was little found that deserved urgent attention. Other areas were to be surveyed in the New Year, and a collated report would follow.

**FC2014/82**

#### **NOTICE of ITEMS IN PROSPECT:**

a) The next Planning Committee Meetings would be on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> December and Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> January at 7pm in the Yarrow Room.

b) The deadline for Grant applications for the next cycle was Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> January, with the assessment Panel meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> February and recommendations being considered by Council on 26<sup>th</sup> February.

c) The next Council Meeting would be on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> January at 7.30pm with the

deadline for submissions to the Town Clerk of proposed items for the agenda being 12 noon on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> January.

d) The office would close for the Christmas break on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> December at 1.00pm and re-open on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> January at 9.00am.

g) Dates would be confirmed for meetings of various Working Parties and liaison groups.

FC2014/83

#### NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING CONSULTANT:

At this point the Mayor proposed, and it was **resolved**:

**FC2014/83.1** *That in view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted during the remainder of the meeting, being tendered costs for a contract to supply specialist services (which remain commercially-sensitive at this time); pursuant to the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960; any members of the press of public present be excluded and instructed to withdraw.*

The public observer duly left the chamber.

FC2014/84

Members considered report FC-ER-012/2014 recommending engagement of a consultant to manage the Neighbourhood Plan process, as proposed by the Lewes Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

The report provided background on the Lewes Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (LNPSG) which the Council had set-up in 2013. The initial list of community organisations was augmented by the time of the inception meeting of this group in November 2013 and further representatives had come forward following public engagement exercises. The Steering Group had adopted operating models that were successfully employed by similar groups elsewhere, which were further ahead in their local process. Members and Officers of the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) regularly attended and participated in meetings, and the SDNPA had contributed funds to the process in addition to its obligations with regards to the statutory phase.

The Council had also engaged with the *Community 21 – Young Digital Citizen* project – a Nominet Trust funded project involving young people in community design and neighbourhood planning through the use of accessible technology. Developed by *Community 21* (an initiative of the University of Brighton and Action in Rural Sussex), young people were engaged using new technologies to elicit their hopes and aspirations for their own future environment.

Since inception, the LNPSG had carried out various community engagement activities and started to analyse feedback. The Steering Group was now seeking specialist professional assistance to manage the formal process; helping the group to identify all relevant data; develop evidence and obtain public feedback to support a master plan for Lewes. The plan would incorporate housing site allocation; green infrastructure; community facilities and infrastructure; enhance existing sustainable transport/street routes in and around the town; protect and enhance the built and natural environment, and reflect the aspirations of the Lewes community.

A panel of five was set up to invite prospective consultants; evaluate incoming bids and then interview shortlisted applicants. Invitations resulted in seventeen initial expressions of interest, and five very comprehensive and informative bids were received and assessed. These were subjected to a structured evaluation by the panel of five assessors. Bids were scored independently by each panellist against five criteria. Equal importance was given to each of these, with 70% weighting given to the quality context overall and 30% given to cost, the sixth criteria.

The panel conducted interviews with three shortlisted candidates on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2014 and were unanimous in their recommendation for the commission. This consultancy demonstrated the requisite abilities; resources; and understanding to the

satisfaction of all panellists and was believed to offer the best overall value and best “fit” with the aspirations of the steering group.

The cost proposed by each candidate in their bids was acknowledged to be a benchmark, as there were several areas in the forthcoming programme of work where exact cost was difficult to estimate. Hourly and day rates for specified personnel, which might apply in such instances, were considered fair and reasonable. It was considered prudent to estimate a maximum overall cost by the end of the process of £50,000.

**It was resolved that:**

**FC2014/84.1** Lewes Town Council will commission Feria Urbanism to work at the direction of the Lewes Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to manage the process of developing the neighbourhood plan to its conclusion, on the basis of the tender submitted. Costs of this work to be drawn from the established financial reserve earmarked for the purpose (shown in the Councils accounts as Fund P5).

**FC2014/85**

There being no further business the Mayor declared the meeting closed, and invited those present to join him in the Parlour for refreshments.

*The meeting ended at 9:05pm*

Signed:

Date:

