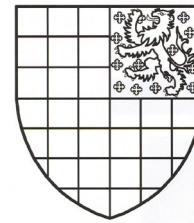


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**LEWES
TOWN
COUNCIL**

MINUTES

Of the meeting of **Lewes Town Council**,
held on **Thursday 3rd September 2020**, online via Zoom Meetings at **7:30pm**.

PRESENT Cllrs J Baah; M Bird; R Burrows; S Catlin (*Deputy Mayor*); G Earl; R Handy; O Henman; J Herbert; J Lamb (*Mayor*); I Makepeace; Dr W Maples; Dr G Mayhew; M Milner; R O'Keeffe; R Waring and K Wood.

In attendance: S Brigden (*Town Clerk [TC]*); Mrs F Garth (*Assistant Town Clerk & Civic Officer*) and Mrs E Tingley (*Cttee. Admin.*)

Observing: Ms L Zeyfert (*All Saints Centre Manager*); B Courage (*Town Ranger*).

FC2020/41 QUESTION TIME: There were no questions.

FC2020/42 MEMBERS DECLARATIONS of INTERESTS: There were none.

FC2020/43 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Apologies for absence were received from Cllr S Sains who was unwell. No message had been received from Cllr J Vernon.

It was resolved that:

FC2020/43.1 Reasons submitted for absence from this meeting are noted.

FC2020/44 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- a) The Mayor reminded everyone of the scheduled talk by Peter McFadyen on 'flatpack democracy' - Thursday 24th September 7:30pm
- b) 'Artwave' – Lewes District art festival would begin the coming weekend
- c) It was now considered unlikely that any of the government's Active Travel Fund grant to East Sussex County Council would be spent in Lewes.
- d) It had been suggested that a conversation might be held with Rye Town Council, as they might be considered a peer and also participate in the Historic Towns Forum.
- e) Everyone was reminded that TC had recently (Tuesday) forwarded a District Council notice of Consultation on Public Space Protection Orders. Members may not have noted that one of the Orders proposed for extension was the Lewes-specific prohibition on public consumption of alcohol in any street in Lewes town centre. This has been in force since 2017 but was due to expire in November. The proposal under consultation was for this and the District Council's other PSPO (relating to dog fouling and applicable across the entire district) to be extended before then, and to last a further three years. The closing date for responses was Tuesday 13 October 2020 at 5pm

FC2020/45 MINUTES:

It was resolved that:

FC2020/45.1 Minutes of the Council meeting held on 30th July 2020 were received and agreed as an accurate record.

FC2020/46 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) Audit Panel 27th July 2020. Council considered the Minutes of this meeting (*copy in Minute book*). The Panel had considered detailed information following the end of the first quarter of the financial year showing actual expenditure and income values as posted to the Council's Sage accounting system for all transactions processed in the period. There was some discussion on salient points of detail, and TC had responded with reference to the identified sources. There had been a general discussion on the apparent reduction in income due to

Covid-19. It was explained that the first quarter figures were slightly misleading in that regard, as income for the Town Hall (T/h) and All Saints Centre (ASC) was traditionally much lower in Qtr1 than at other times of year, due to the profile of regular hires. It appeared that salary and overhead budgets were underspent, and TC explained that savings had been made principally as usual levels of overtime had not been worked due to Covid-19.

Due to remote working TC had been unable to present the file of periodic bank reconciliations for review of the scrutiny already conducted, where ordinarily the Chairman would append his signature to verify this, but this could be done in arrears at any point during the year.

The Panel had considered the report of the Council's retained Internal Auditor for year-ended March 2020. The structure of this was designed to confirm that every element of the statutory audit framework was satisfied and, supported by the routine work of the Panel, was to give Council the confidence that it should affirm each statement on the statutory Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR). Members had raised various questions on topics such as frequency of monitoring; the statutory framework; principles of appropriation and other practical issues.

Regarding the impact of Covid-19: TC had explained lost income from Town Hall and All Saints Centre; the partial offset by savings in areas such as staff overtime and consumable stores, and the items of expenditure to facilitate eventual re-opening that were in excess of 'normal' expenses for the period. The nett effect was a cost of around £36,000. In terms of prospects for remobilization, TC had indicated that the ASC booking diary showed many prospective bookings from September and was almost back to normal levels from the New Year. It was acknowledged that these were not yet confirmed, and the situation was fluid. The regular hirers at the Town Hall were more "institutional" in character and many had already decided to cancel all activity until at least January 2021.

The Panel had considered information on the Council's financial status and management for the first quarter; and found no items of concern. It was acknowledged that routine bank reconciliations would be validated by physical signature at a later date. The Panel had noted the Internal Auditor's report and signified their understanding of the statements it contained. Following presentation of these Minutes, a comment was made, further to a lengthy discussion on the matter at the Audit Panel meeting itself, regarding the accounting code structure. It had been suggested that the nominal ledger detail codes used in everyday management were not 'transparent' and impeded understanding by Councillors and the public. There followed an effective echo of the discussion that had been held by the Panel, and TC advised emphatically that the system under discussion was not relevant to transparency or public understanding as it was not 'visible' in published accounts or statutory returns; being simply an internal structure for the routine management of financial data. Further: it was not necessary for Councillors to be particularly familiar with underlying codes, as their consideration of financial matters at either Audit Panel; Finance Working Party, or Council was unlikely to require such knowledge and was always accompanied by professional advice. Any alternative system of coding that might be used would be susceptible to the same criticism by anyone unfamiliar with it, and there was no valid reason to change. As the council's Responsible Finance Officer (RFO)(s151 Local Government Act 1972) TC was responsible for determining the accounting control systems and ensuring that they are observed, and he could see no justification that the amount of work that would be involved in restructuring the Council's SAGE accounts system was worthwhile at this time. He reminded Members that the systems in place – used as 'everyday' tools by officers with regular updating for 18 years – had been praised by professional auditors and described as 'robust and fit for purpose'.

It was resolved that:

FC2020/46.1 The Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Panel held on 27th July 2020 are received and noted.

b) *Participatory budgeting workshop 28th July 2020.* Council considered the notes of this meeting (*copy in the Minute book*), to which all had been invited.

The workshop had begun with a summary of the principles of participatory budgeting (PB), and reference to the evaluation by central government published in 2011, previously distributed to Members. The 'legacy' of PB could be described as falling into two categories: one where fundamental budgets were evolved with public participation, and one where a specific fund or funds (*eg grants*) were identified for expenditure according to public wishes. TC had explained the principles underlying existing budgets, which largely provided for things to which Council was committed. If it was Council's wish to create a defined fund for public participation this was possible, although Members should remember that the General Fund balance in the past four years had remained some £200,000 below recommended acceptable levels. While there was no 'spare' money, and the current Covid pandemic was likely to result in significant lost income, there could be scope for redeployment of some funds, such as those presently 'earmarked' for discretionary projects which could be deferred.

There had been some concerns raised about this being a difficult time for new initiatives, due to Covid, but others remarked that the post-Covid circumstances were likely to present an ideal opportunity for the introduction of a pilot scheme. Examples were cited, such as Brazil and, in the UK: Newcastle

It was observed that in Lewes there is "an appetite for engagement", although many of the areas which featured in public perceptions were the legal duties of other bodies, and LTC had no powers to act, or was prohibited. There was a general feeling that the community in Lewes was positively engaged at this level of thinking although with the acknowledgement that, in reality, this perception could be based upon the profile of relatively few individuals or bodies. Members recognized that while enthusiasm is welcome, they were elected as representatives and must remain alert to the less visible; vocal or articulate amongst their community.

With regard to the present budget and potential flexibility there was a significant loss of income likely due to the protracted closure of Town Hall and All Saints Centre, although some of that would be offset by savings in overhead and direct costs. The estimated position at the end of the first financial quarter was a nett loss of roughly £36,000, having taken account of all definable factors. There were budgets, however, that currently provided for civic events; catering, Twinning etc which would not be utilized as activity in those areas was suspended; and it was reasonable to assume savings in a number of other areas. Projects that relied upon earmarked reserves would all be deferred for at least one year and there were some Reserves that were intended for projects not yet defined, such as environmental enhancements. Such funds could be temporarily appropriated for other purposes, although there should be a clear indication of when they would be reinstated.

TC was emphatic that; while he had attempted to show where there might be some flexibility, Members could not ignore the importance of the situation regarding the General Fund, which had been depleted due to a number of urgent requirements in recent years and was around £200,000 below the level that auditors considered appropriate. The current budget contained a sum of £50,000 derived from precept and earmarked as a mechanism to reinstate the General Fund over three or four years. Auditors recognized this intention but would not view kindly any measure that slowed that rate of recovery.

The majority of the eleven Members who had been present were confident that money could be found for a participative budget, and they did not wish to delay introduction of a pilot scheme. TC outlined the principles underlying the engagement of unelected individuals, and the conditions that would apply to anyone who was appointed to a Participatory Budgeting 'Panel'. There had followed a general discussion of mechanisms for communication and the advisability of obtaining independent advice to set up a pilot scheme. TC advised that the Working Party could not work outside its present remit without a mandate from Council.

It was generally agreed that a pilot scheme would be proposed to Council, and it would be asked to temporarily extend the remit of the Finance Working Party to investigate inclusion of such a scheme in the 2021/22 budget.

It was resolved that:

FC2020/46.2 The notes of the Participatory Budgeting Workshop held on 28th July 2020 (*copy in Minute book*) are received and noted.

c) Personnel Panel workshop 28th July 2020:

Councillor Wood reported on this latest workshop; on continuing work towards appointment of a successor Town Clerk in view of TC's scheduled retirement in December 2021. A revised Job Description had evolved through earlier workshops which now needed to be reduced in length as many detailed elements should be redirected to either a draft contract of employment or an applicant's information pack. The exercise would also produce documents for a separate Responsible Finance Officer as it was considered that this role could be straightforwardly filled by recruitment of a part-time specialist and removing those responsibilities would widen the range of potential applicants for the Town Clerk post. Final drafts would be prepared shortly, and it was proposed that a suitably experienced professional Human Resources consultant should then be engaged to evaluate appropriate salary gradings; devise a suitable recruitment programme and advise the Council through that process.

It was resolved that:

FC2020/46.3 The oral report on the Personnel Panel workshop held on 8th July 2020 is received and noted, and the approaches taken by the Panel are agreed.

d) Grant Panel 19th August 2020: Council considered report FC010/2020 (*copy in Minute book*) containing recommendations for payments of grants for the first cycle (of four) for the year 2020/21.

It was resolved that:

FC2020/46.4 The grant payments recommended in report FC010/2020 (*copy in minute book*) (as shown in column G of the table appended to that report) be approved.

FC2020/47

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM:

Council discussed a proposal (*NOM008/2020 Copy in the Minute book*) that Council should take a lead in the promotion of the concept of 'responsible tourism' to Lewes. It was stated that the impact of Coronavirus on travel and tourism meant that Lewes and the surrounding area had received more inward tourism than in previous years. Not all visitors had been respectful of the town's environment, local countryside or local residents.

There were many press reports on the south coast and locally of the impact of increased visitors' numbers in terms of rubbish, damage to the natural environment, wild camping impacts and a general attitude to leaving behind rubbish and possessions as if at a festival.

There were understood to be a number of documented cases locally of camping with tents and equipment, fire pits and rubbish left behind. There was also a lack of appreciation not only of the local wildlife and ecology but also of some of the dangers presented such as wild swimming in certain areas of the Ouse.

The motion proposed that the Town Council take a lead in the promotion of the concept of 'responsible tourism' to Lewes by:

- > Creating a Town Guide (similar to the Seaford Beach Guide) with information on rubbish disposal, recycling locations and water refill services within Lewes for tourists and visitors. Clear directions to public toilets and other facilities, information on the country code and respecting the local country and Downland environment including how to behave responsibly in the countryside, with livestock, wild animals and plants *eg* statute that makes it an offence to pick wildflowers *etc*, and would cover issues such as wild camping, river use, wild swimming, fires. The Town Guide to be promoted through the Tourist Information Centre (TIC), Council website and more widely and to link to LewesDC and ESx County Council resources.
- > To modify the print version of Lewes Tourist map and to investigate an online downloadable version (to be hosted on the website or with the TIC). Links to social distancing and safety information as part of the package. Links to suggested walks, tourist information boards locations.
- > Press and communications campaign by Council group to promote responsible tourism/travel concept.

There was some hesitation by Councillors to criticize without clear evidence, and acknowledgment that the 'offenders' may in fact be local. It was, nonetheless, generally considered a valid proposal, although many of the elements referred-to were not directly

within the control of the Town Council. It was understood that to address these aims, it would be necessary to have support of such bodies as Lewes District Council; South Downs National Park Authority, and Wildlife Trusts *etc.*

It was generally agreed that a small group of Members might practically work on production of draft material for consideration by Council, and nominations were accepted.

It was resolved that:

FC2020/47.1 Lewes Town Council will take a lead in the promotion of the concept of 'responsible tourism' to Lewes by:

- 1) Creation of a Town Guide for tourists and visitors to be promoted through the Tourist Information Centre, Council website and more widely, with links to LDC and ESCC resources.
- 2) Modification of the print version of Lewes Tourist map and investigation of an online downloadable version.
- 3) A press and communications campaign to promote responsible tourism/travel concept.

FC2020/47.2 A group of Councillors consisting of Cllrs Wood; Baah; O'Keeffe and a representative of the Green group – *individual to be confirmed* – are asked to draft material for consideration by Council.

FC2020/48

TOM PAINE COMMEMORATION:

A motion (*NOM009/2020 Copy in the Minute book*) explained that 2021 is the 230th anniversary of Thomas Paine's famous book the Rights of Man. Paine lived in Lewes from 1768 to 1774 above Bull House, the tobacco shop of Samuel and Esther Ollive whose daughter he married in 1771. From 1772 to 1773, Paine joined excise officers asking Parliament for better pay and working conditions, publishing, in summer of 1772, The Case of the Officers of Excise - his first political work, spending the London winter distributing the 4,000 copies printed to the Parliament and others. His seminal book, The Rights Of Man, was one of the most widely read books of its time.

8th June is the date of Tom Paine's death and it was suggested that this would be a good time to celebrate the thesis of Thomas Paine's work and its legacy especially in relation to "our special town". It was proposed that the Town Council might co-organise a street party in Lewes on Sunday 6th June 2021. The Commemorations and Events committee could be asked to work on the detail and work with Lewes societies, businesses and residents, and to test viability. Further: Lewes Thomas Paine day could be a permanent annual fixture in Lewes, with events and parties held on the nearest Sunday to 8th June.

There followed a debate in which several points were argued, resulting in a vote on an amendment (*not carried*) and, subsequently, each element of the proposals.

Consequently, **it was resolved that:**

FC2020/48.1 Lewes Town Council agrees in-principle to co-organise a street party in Lewes on Sunday 6th June 2021 to coincide with Thomas Paine's death on 8th June, and asks the Commemorations Committee to develop a proposal regarding these decisions

FC2020/48.2 Lewes Town Council will recognize 'Thomas Paine day' as an annual fixture with events held on the nearest Sunday to 8th June

FC2020/48.3 Cllr M Milner is appointed to the Commemorations Committee.

FC2020/49

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING:

Members considered a proposal (*NOM010/2020 Copy in the Minute book*) to begin assessment for a Participatory Budget pilot in the coming financial year.

It was explained that Participatory Budgeting is a form of public engagement in the budget-making process that has been employed since the mid- 2000s. There were a wide range of examples, including two main types: a) consultation and public priority setting on the 'core services' budget, including choices on facilities, venue management and key services; b) community grant approach, which sets a specific sum of the budget to be allocated to community projects via a range of informative sessions and deliberative meetings to ensure a spectrum of residents' views are heard (including ensuring broad outreach according to age, gender, disability, geographic spread etc) and balanced choices are reached.

Introducing Participatory Budgeting (PB), it was stated, would also help materialize the collective goal (established through the Visioning exercise) of expanding the openness of the council in its decision-making.

Following on from the workshop hosted on 28 July 2020 [*Minute FC2020/46 b*] to consider the wider approach to PB and how this might be applied in Lewes; it was proposed that Council agree to task the Finance Working Party to evaluate the budget availability for a participatory budget pilot in the coming financial year.

It was resolved that:

FC2020/49.1 The Finance Working Party is asked to evaluate the budget availability for a participatory budget pilot in the coming financial year; that a budget for this be set within the annual budget cycle, and that community meetings be arranged with sufficient time for broad inclusion and appropriate public awareness-raising in the coming year (2021-22).

FC2020/50

EAST SUSSEX COLLEGE ART FACULTY SUPPORT:

Council welcomed James DiBiase, Senior Tutor of the Fine Arts and Design Department of East Sussex College, who was attending with regard to a decision deferred from the previous meeting; about exhibition space within the Town Hall. A report (*FC011/2020 – copy in the Minute book*) explained that:

At its previous meeting, Council had considered a proposal that it should show support for the Fine Art and Design Extended Diploma students of Sussex Downs College by:

- › Engaging with them as clients of their final year presentation.
 - › Offering exhibition space within the Town Hall building to display the work produced
- Town Council to be the “client” for the 20/21 cohort of students.

There were currently 14 students, who had been working remotely since March and from December of this year would prepare for an exhibition to be displayed at the end of March or beginning of April 2021. It is a requirement of the qualification (the equivalent of 3 A Levels) to plan, promote and display their own artwork. Having an opportunity to showcase their work within the community is highly significant and beneficial in their learning.

At the time of the Council meeting, it was not known what the actual space requirements might be for an exhibition, and some very rough estimates of the value of likely spaces within the Town Hall were indicated. Accordingly, Council resolved that it would engage as ‘client’ but reserved its decision as to exhibition space.

The course tutor had subsequently confirmed the ideal requirements, which would involve exhibition of work in the Foyer; Baxter corridor; Yarrow Room; Council Chamber and Corn Exchange during the period 22nd March - 20th April 2021, during the Easter period/term holiday. Allowance was made for days to install the work and to strike the exhibition, and public opening hours were proposed. The use of a display board system belonging to the Reeves Archive Project would also be required, and permission was being sought.

On that basis the hire charges that would normally apply (discounted for a ‘not-for-profit’ hirer), and estimated staff cost (presuming no concurrent hires) had been calculated and resulted in an aggregate sum of £51,936. Mr DiBiase noted that he could plan for a shorter and less extensive exhibition, and after a short debate Council agreed to defer the decision once more until a meeting could be held between Mr DiBiase; the Town Clerk, and the Town Hall Manager to develop a detailed proposal for a more modest plan.

It was resolved that:

FC2020/50.1 Report FC011/2020 (*copy in the Minute book*) is noted and a decision on the offer of exhibition space to East Sussex College is deferred pending further discussion.

FC2020/51

A27 HIGHWAY PROPOSALS

A Motion (*NOM011/2020 – copy in the Minute book*) proposed that the Council should write to Maria Caulfield MP to express its opposition to any new dual carriageway along the South Downs National Park and to seek clarity on the current proposals that emerged from the A27 Reference Group (which she chaired). A letter should also be written to the appropriate officers at Highways England to seek further information on their proposed next steps,

including timeline for proposals, budget, environmental impact assessment and consultation process.

Recent press announcements had been noted; that Highways England was considering options for future expansion of the A27 road East of Lewes (Beddingham to Polegate). It was proposed that the Council should seek clarity on any potential impact on traffic in the town, considering that independent studies had suggested that any road expansion in the area was likely to induce further traffic at an already highly congested junction, from the Malling Street roundabout/Cuilfail Tunnel to the exit from the town.

There followed a brief debate in which it was made clear that Council should seek further clarity on any potential impact on traffic in the town, with scoping research published in advance of any decisions. This should also reflect concerns with Climate Emergency. It was recognized that in removing any bottleneck it was often found that they simply relocated.

It was agreed that letters should be written along these lines, and Cllr Henman was asked to provide TC with appropriate details for inclusion.

Subsequently, **it was resolved that:**

FC2020/51.1 The Council will write to Maria Caulfield MP to express its opposition to any new dual carriageway along the South Downs National Park and to seek clarity on the current proposals that emerged from the A27 Reference Group which she chaired. The Council seeks further clarity on any potential impact on traffic in the town, with scoping research published in advance of any decisions. This should also reflect concerns with Climate Emergency

FC2020/52.1 The Council will write to Highways England to seek further information on their proposed next steps, including timeline for proposals, budget, environmental impact assessment and consultation process.

FC2020/52

TIMBERYARD LANE

The meeting considered a motion (*NOM012/2020 copy in the Minute book*) to assist in local community attempts to resolve problems with Timberyard Lane; an unadopted road in Cliffe off South Street. The Lane, it was stated, has multiple owners who do not work together to maintain it. Parts of the surface were severely pot-holed, and the drainage was very poor. The pavements at the South end were now sunken to the level of the road due to poor resurfacing. It would be beneficial to residents if the road were to be brought up to a proper standard and maintained. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) asked for £500 as a Community Match contribution towards a feasibility study that would at least establish the cost of bringing the road up to adoption standard and renewing the signage. It was considered that ESCC should be asked to include local ward councillors and Cliffe Residents Association as consultees in the feasibility study.

During debate of this proposal it was suggested that the present condition – described as a “useful mess” – had actually hidden benefits in that traffic was forced to run at very low speed and parking was unrestricted; acknowledged to be an invaluable local resource. There was understood to be no duty for ESCC to adopt the Lane even if improved to the required standards, but the feasibility study would be needed in any event.

Subsequently, **it was resolved that:**

FC2020/52.1 Lewes Town Council will contribute £500 as ‘Community Match Funding’ to East Sussex County Council for a feasibility study into the improvement of surfacing at Timberyard Lane. This sum to be drawn from the earmarked financial Reserve shown as R3 in the council’s accounts.

FC2020/53

UPDATE ON MATTERS IN PROGRESS

Annual Plan - TC noted salient developments in items within the Plan, which was included in the Agenda

Malling Community Centre - It was possible that building work might be completed by November, but there would then follow a period of fitting-out and equipping the building, which was unlikely to be available for public use before Christmas. A Building Working Party meeting was imminent, at which management proposals would be considered.

Pells – A question was raised as to the prospect of works at the Pells which would enable repointing of the lake stonework. The position of Lewes District Council and North Street

Quarter Ltd was unclear, but there was understood to be some movement towards formal engagement of a development partner who would commence works. The flood defence works within the NSQ plans were fundamental to the earliest phase of that scheme and would affect the viability and cost of any work to the lake and other 'on hold' local projects.

Devolution – There arose a question regarding devolution of 2 Fisher Street and the Market Tower. TC reminded Council that it had advised Lewes District Council recently that the Town Council wished to preserve an option to acquire these sites but that it understood the financial pressures and requests to LDC by third-parties to make some immediate use of them. There had been no subsequent contact.

Training needs self-assessments – TC prompted those who had not yet returned a self-assessment, to now do so.

FC2020/54

NOTICE of ITEMS IN PROSPECT

Members, asked to consider items arising from this meeting worthy of a Press Release, indicated:

- Timberyard Lane agreement
- A27 statement and questions

Dates to note etc for forthcoming meetings and events would be sent by TC to all by email the next day, due to the lateness of the hour.

There being no further business the Mayor closed the meeting; and thanked everyone for their contributions.

The meeting ended at 10.05pm

Signed: Date:

Draft