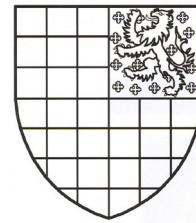


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**LEWES
TOWN
COUNCIL**

MINUTES

Of the meeting of **Lewes Town Council**,
held on **Thursday 29th April 2021**, online via Zoom Meetings at **7:30pm**.

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

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

Observing: Ms L Zeyfert (*All Saints Centre Manager*); Ms H Roxx (*Malling Community Centre Manager*); Ms F Willis (*Asst. Malling Community Centre Manager*) and B Courage (*Town Ranger*)

Council's Chaplain, Revd Judith Egar, preceded the meeting with a few words on the human need to encounter others in three dimensions even when subject to Covid restrictions such as face coverings and 'social distancing', and the limitations of online (2-D) meetings.

FC2020/113 QUESTION TIME: There were none.

FC2020/114 MEMBERS DECLARATIONS of INTERESTS: There were none.

FC2020/115 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Were received from Cllrs Makepeace and Mayhew who had family commitments.

FC2020/116 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- a) All present joined in offering congratulations to Lizzie Zeyfert, who was expecting a baby and would commence maternity leave in the late summer.
- b) The Mayor announced that this would be the last Full Council Meeting that he would Chair and that his last formal engagement would be on 30th April with PATINA who were holding a 5 a side football event.
- c) The Mayor had recently attended the Citizens Advice Bureau AGM and gave members a brief assessment, describing threats to the service that the Bureau provided at a time they are needed more than ever.

FC2020/117 MINUTES:

It was resolved that:

FC2020/117.1 Minutes of the Council meeting held on 4th March 2021 were received and agreed as an accurate record.

FC2020/118 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) UN Sustainability Goals W-pty sub-group 2nd March 2021: Council considered the Notes of this meeting presented by Cllr Dr Baah (*copy in minute book*):

In considering priorities for a sustainability audit the group had discussed ways in which the Council could carry this out, aiming at concrete measures/actions in the implementation and monitoring of the audit, and promoting residents' involvement with it. The committee proposals for spending the £15,000 pounds allocated for environmental audit were: a) £5,000 to be spent on an in-house corporate sustainability audit such as building/operations etc. This should be achieved by opening this to tender as soon as practicable. b) £5,000 to improve the biodiversity and environmental governance of Landport Bottom. There were on-going initiatives on this site and it was proposed that this money should complement those. Cllr Bird could give an overview of what had been achieved already on the site and how The

money might be spent on things with high biodiversity potential. c) £5,000 to be spent on a town-wide biodiversity audit. This might include nature corridors, trees, habitats, etc. Cllr Makepeace and Cllr Baah would reach out to and collaborate with local community groups to set out priorities for this. This was one way of promoting community dialogue with the Council to support the implementation and/or monitoring of our environmental activities. Professors from the University of Sussex's Institute of Development Studies, Life Sciences and Science Policy Research Unit, and Law were willing to play a part in this.

A school project to precede the planned Glasgow UN Sustainability Summit in November 2021 was discussed.

It was recommended that a video competition might be promoted, with a footage from each school in Lewes and Ringmer, focusing on at least one of the United Nations' five Ps - People, Prosperity, Planet, Peace, and Partnerships. It was proposed that a representative from each school, residents and councillors would vote to select the best three or so videos to be shown on the bigger screen in Glasgow.

There followed a wide-ranging discussion in which most Councillors participated, and subsequently **it was resolved that:**

FC2020/118.1 The Notes of the meeting of the UN Sustainability Goals Working Party sub-group held on 21st March 2021 are received and noted, and the Working Party's recommendations are approved.

b) Open Council Working Party 29th March 2021. Council considered the Minutes of this meeting (*copy in minute book*).

Public Participatory Budget pilot: Council had asked the Working party to consider ways to engage the public with the agreed participatory budget pilot scheme, asking the community to help prioritize the list of projects contained in s11 of the Neighbourhood Plan; all being eligible for funding from accrued Community Infrastructure Levy receipts. TC had attempted to estimate the likely costs for the items/projects listed and presented some preliminary evaluations but advised that it had soon become apparent that there were too many variable factors affecting the majority of the items to allow estimation in any meaningful way. Most were outside the direct control of the Town Council, and several were dependent upon, or involved integration with, much broader issues or projects. There followed a general discussion on these aspects. TC submitted that these complexities served to defeat the original intention to present to the public a simple list that could be prioritized. Members contributed a number of suggestions to engage the public's interest, including a pre-selected list; 'top-ten' or 'top five' ranking or similar. It was recognized that any pre-selection could be seen as counter to the basic principle of public participation. For practicality, however, it was thought that the list would need to be reduced to show only those projects which might realistically be expected to begin if funding were available (eg physical features for traffic calming). A question arose as to how other councils conducted public participatory budgeting exercises, but these were relatively rare. Suggestions for engagement included 'World café' format events, and/or online surveys, and a particularly well-received idea for an event with a theme based upon the Top Trumps Cards concept. It had been recognized that the *PBNetwork* organization might offer some early advice free of charge, but their main services were chargeable and it was sensible to ensure ideas were 'crystallized' into succinct plans before engaging. Discussion ranged widely on various aspects and implications of the matter. It had been agreed that a sub-group consisting of Cllrs Catlin, Vernon, and Dr Maples would meet to develop outline proposals along the lines of these discussions.

Candidates for nomination as Mayor/Deputy: The meeting considered a note prepared by Cllr Makepeace regarding the roles of Mayor and Deputy Mayor. This described a perspective on the process by which candidates were presented for the roles and extended into the nature of the roles themselves. A number of the underlying assumptions were examined, and some misunderstandings were corrected. There were certain fundamental aspects of the roles which are governed by statute, but the extended roles at a 'ceremonial' Council such as Lewes were, broadly, a product of custom and practice although much was based upon nationally-recognized conventions and protocols. It was acknowledged that Council could consider and control broader aspects of the roles. A concern was recognized as to the process by which

candidates were presented and voted-for in a Council meeting, and further consideration could be given to that process. It was suggested that all candidates should be subject to a standard process with ‘manifesto’ aspects (*eg* proposed charities to be supported) declared in advance and open to questioning at the meeting. Further, nominations should be controlled *eg* to avoid individuals serving multiple times. As some Members had to leave the meeting and the subject was actually outside the remit of the Working party, it was agreed that this matter would be left at this point, and it was accepted that debate in this regard should, properly, be proposed to a meeting of Council.

Other matters: There followed a general discussion on subjects including Freegle; a proposed Communication officer; email contact with customers and allotment tenants; parish meeting; a Lewes News survey on the Connecting Lewes digital inclusion initiative. It was expected that the Town Hall weekly market would reopen on 13th April and Cllr Dr Maples and Cllr Sains would attend a Councillor’s surgery desk.

It was resolved that:

FC2020/118.2 The Minutes of the Open Council Working Party held on 29th March 2021 are received and noted.

c) Grants Panel 3rd March 2021:

Members considered report FC020/2020 (copy in minute book) describing a supplementary round of grants for 2020/21. Council at its meeting on 4th March 2021 had asked the Panel to disburse a supplementary round of grants before the financial year-end, as the Grants budget for 2020/21 still held a significant unspent balance.

It was resolved that:

FC2020/118.3 The grant payments described in report FC020/2020 (*copy in minute book*), as shown in column G of the table appended to that report, are noted.

d) All Saints Centre Steering Group 8th April 2021: Council considered the Minutes of this meeting (*copy in minute book*). The Group had addressed matters as:

Prospective ‘remobilization’ and relaxation of covid-19 restrictions: TC gave an update on the position regarding allowable events under Covid-19 regulations and noted that after 12th April it was anticipated that some educational events should be possible. A limited schedule had been publicized. It was noted that ‘headline’ information in the media was often not consistent with the actual regulations or government statutory guidance. The appropriate guidance was monitored, and plans adapted as appropriate to any developments in that regard.

Staff changes: Ms Zeyfert was pleased to announce that she was expecting a baby and was planning to commence maternity leave in late Summer. The Centre’s staff establishment currently had a vacancy for a Venue Assistant created by the recent promotion of Ms Tully and transfer of Ms Roxx to Malling Community Centre. Although there was no immediate pressure as the Centre would gradually increase operations as Covid restrictions eased, the recruitment would need to begin reasonably soon. TC intended that the Chair of the Steering Group would be invited to attend interviews in due course.

Suggested improvements to external lighting of the Centre: Members considered a report prepared by a local lighting engineer, working with Cllr Milner and others. This proposed various enhancements to the Centre’s profile through external lighting (building; grounds and noticeboards *etc*). Councillors considered these ideas attractive but they would need to be costed and developed further. Ms Zeyfert noted that lighting of the tower would require planning consent, and she confirmed that bats roosted somewhere on the site. It was very important that this was investigated, as disturbing a roost is environmentally damaging and also illegal. It was acknowledged that any lighting proposals could be designed to mitigate against disruption to any existing bat populations. An informal estimate of cost had been obtained from an electrical contractor for some elements, which might be installed outside any major scheme, although Members were interested to estimate the cost of a unified project. Whilst the project might not prove prohibitively expensive, TC drew attention to the long list of dilapidations that had been identified by commissioned structural surveyor, and the aggregate of over £400,000 in estimate costs, which was to be discussed as the following item on the meeting agenda.

Recent surveys and reports on priorities for building repairs: A structural survey of the Centre had been presented to Council in 2020. This detailed report comprehensively described various items of repair that were considered necessary. Members were pleased to note the description of the Grade 2* listed building as: “Overall, this building is in remarkably good condition considering the mixture of constructions and ages and this reflects care in the ownership, renovations and extensions through the 19th and 20th centuries until it was deconsecrated. Its condition also reflects high quality renovations during the 1980s followed by excellent care and maintenance since, together with further modernisations such as for the heating system and west end lavatories. The level of maintenance repairs currently identified is much less than would be expected for a previously-redundant building of this size and complexity and reflects well on its management”. This commendation notwithstanding; 20 areas of work and individual items identified as necessary or desirable were shown in a table with estimated costs ranging from £2,000 to £59,000 - in aggregate amounting to £415,000. It was recognized that many of these were not immediate concerns, and that schedule was being used to inform the drafting of a programme for future prioritized work. Several areas required further, specialized, surveys and these were being commissioned according to priority. It was recognized that, whilst specific surveys had been conducted for particular issues arising (*eg* damp; heating system; roof guttering) the comprehensive survey conducted in 2020 was the first of such scope commissioned by the Council since taking control of the Centre. A recent survey on the electrical installation had reported that the services were in good condition but with a short list of works required before it could be recorded as ‘satisfactory’. These were being addressed. As works were commissioned, contractors were asked to allow for future development, such as additional lighting, to ensure the most efficient use of funds. TC confirmed that there was an established financial Reserve for repairs and maintenance of the Centre and the recent annual contribution from the Council Tax precept had been £20,000 giving an available sum of over £50,000. Added to the operational budget provision for responsive repairs each year, it should be possible to address the works listed in an appropriate timeframe. The most immediate concern was the age-related structural deformation of the Victorian cast-iron supporting columns in the main hall, and these had been assessed and would need to be replaced with modern steel fabrications, which could be manufactured to appear similar. This was a safety concern, and the structural engineer was liaising with the District Conservation Officers and a local specialist contractor to confirm requirements and quotation of cost. There followed a general discussion on the cost; timescales, and relative priorities of works required. These would be refined as quotations were received and discrete elements were further investigated. The Steering Group agreed the approach being taken to expedite structural works and would recommend that Council take note of the issues discussed and endorse this. There was a brief discussion on various general matters before the meeting ended.

FC2020/118.4 The Minutes of the meeting of the All Saints Centre Steering Group held on 8th April 2021 are received and noted and their decisions approved. Further, a detailed estimate for the proposed external lighting scheme should be sought.

e) Transport Committee 13th April 2021: Council considered the Minutes of this meeting (*copy in minute book*).

It was noted that officers from East Sussex County Council (ESCC) had been invited, to facilitate discussion on specific issues, but their Transport Planning Manager had regretfully declined having “taken advice in respect of the current County Council Purdah* period” This unfortunately limited the discussion that was be possible on matters of detail/status of projects, although a brief update had been provided against the two items on the agenda for which ESCC officers were invited to attend. The Chair wished to record the committee’s disappointment that this was the second meeting at which ESCC contributions had been so limited. **(related to prohibited publicity/ actions during a pre-election period).*

Cycle Route 90: Improvement of local sections of regional cycle Route 90 was a project identified as a high priority by Cycle Lewes (CL) and had been noted in the Lewes Neighbourhood Plan (*s11.7*) as a project listed to benefit from future receipts of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). There was a vital “missing link” between Brighton Road and Cliffe

High Street/South Street. To complete the mostly on-road route required several elements of signage and physical features to be added within the town.

ESCC's Transport Planning Manager had provide the following statement: *"Following discussion with Cycle Lewes, the proposed route was split into a number of sections with the aim being to deliver at least some of the sections over time, if the whole route from the A27 at Southerham to the A27 at Brighton Road is not achievable as one scheme. Proposed plans for the eastern section of the route, from the A27 at Southerham to Cliffe High Street, will be going out to key stakeholder consultation after the local government elections in May. The County Council member for Ringmer & Lewes Bridge Ward will be notified of the proposals before they go out to consultation. ESCC made a bid to Highways England for a contribution to the signalised crossing of the A26 at Cliffe Industrial Estate but we were unsuccessful and are on their reserve list. Western section (Cliffe High Street to Brighton Road) via Pinwell Road, Bell Lane Recreation Ground and Winterbourne Lane: A large number of options have been considered but there are very challenging technical and financial obstacles to overcome at a few key points (Pinwell Road, Bell Lane, and the gradient from Winterbourne Lane to Brighton Road). Western section (Cliffe High Street to Brighton Road) via School Hill, High Street, Western Road.: With the challenges posed by the indirect route (above), officers were asked to look at an on road route following the 'spine' of Lewes. An initial RAG study into this alignment has classified sections into the following achievability ratings, using latest guidance from the Department for Transport (LTN 1/20): Red (difficult) Amber (moderate) Green (straightforward). The result of this study now needs to be considered in terms of implication for deliverability. County Council officers will be happy to discuss the next steps for taking forward RR90 with the two ESCC Members after the County election in May."*

Cycle Lewes had formed a joint working group on the C90 and would provide feedback to the Committee in due course. There followed a discussion on recent resurfacing works adjacent to Bell Lane Recreation Ground, carried out by Lewes District Council. This was not related to the C90 proposals but had raised some concerns regarding the 'desire route' taken by cyclists where cycling was, technically, prohibited. No increase in use had been noted, but it was observed that some cyclists had become 'bolder' and were traveling faster. Signage that had been removed was to be replaced in a more up to date format.

Safe School Streets: ESCC's Transport Planning Manager had provide the following statement: *"The School Streets six-week trial project started on 15 March 2021 and will finish on 7 May 2021. The first part of the trial ran from 15 March to 1 April. Sustrans is supporting the school [Southover] to deliver the School Streets project and has received positive feedback from the staff and pupils at the school about the benefits of reducing the amount of traffic on the streets around the school at drop off and pick up time. The scheme will undergo a full review at the end of the six-week trial period. We will be monitoring the impact of the measures and will listen to feedback from residents, businesses and the school community. Once the review has been undertaken on all six of the School Streets projects around the county, we will be able to determine whether or not the project could operate on a permanent basis subject to funding and local support."*

The committee discussed a number of matters ancillary to the project and were interested to know if this should be interpreted that analysis of a county-wide result might affect local implementation. This could not be answered definitively, but it was understood that discrete projects would be assessed on their merits. Locally, Southover School was a test-site. Feedback from parents and observers suggested that the experiment was already showing beneficial results, although a view was expressed that the levels of activity in the area were untypical due to Covid restrictions, and this would distort any analysis. It was noted that activity related to Western Road school was also a factor, although they were not formally involved. This point was acknowledged, although it was understood that ESCC would take some account of these factors. There was general approval of the scheme, and conclusions were awaited with interest.

Community Speedwatch: The Coordinator of Lewes Community Speedwatch (LCS) presented a report on the initiative. Lewes was one of the many Community Speedwatch groups organised by the Police in Sussex and expanding into Police forces across England. The Police provide equipment (speed gun and badged high viz yellow jackets) and send out warning letters to offenders. Volunteers work in pairs to identify speeding motorists at roadside spots agreed with the Police and input the results to the Community Speedwatch website. It is "educational" in that motorist are not fined, but after two letters they are visited by the local

Neighbourhood Police team. As a result of LCS activities, since 2013, over 11,000 speeding motorists had been sent warning letters, including over 1,000 in the last three months. LCS operate on the 20mph, 30mph and 40mph areas in and around Lewes using the Police threshold for enforcement action (10% plus 2mph above the speed limit). The Group decide where to be present and tend to operate where there is local concern about speeding. Most motorists were observed to slow down when they see yellow jackets. LCS expect to record a speeding motorist every two minutes. Much of the speeding is thought to be carelessness and it was believed that warning letters were taken seriously and led to attempts to change driving habits. Around 80% of those identified as speeding are travelling 5 to 10mph above the speed limit, but that was still too fast for people to feel safe enough to encourage walking and cycling. The new Sussex Police Chief Constable had indicated support for Speedwatch groups and had appointed a Chief Inspector to that end. This was likely to include Police Officers joining Speedwatch sessions and stopping and talking to motorists and/or serving fixed penalty fines (with the option of speed awareness courses). It was agreed that the Council could help Community Speedwatch by publicising its work and encouraging people to sign up as volunteers for the Lewes group at <https://communityspeedwatch.org/FRONT-v2-Home.php> There followed a discussion regarding the ability of police to prosecute all offenders, and the practicality of theoretical thresholds for prosecution. There was debate as to the real effect of 20mph limits, and statutory controls on their introduction. The Town Council had supported 20mph limits for many years and had contributed funds toward introduction. There was general support among committee members for a town-wide 20mph restriction.

Feasibility appraisal iro A26 Malling Hill: Lewes Town Council (LTC), had requested a feasibility study to be carried out by East Sussex Highways (ESH) on measures to reduce vehicle speeds along the A26, Malling Hill, Lewes and investigation of options to reduce the volume of traffic along this section of the A26. It was envisaged that the reduction of vehicle speeds and volumes would provide a safer environment for residents. The committee considered the report (ESH ref ABSL-0898, copy in the Minute Book), which had taken account of traffic speed and volume data, and crash/injury data from Sussex Safer roads Partnership. Based upon the available crash data ESCC “would not consider the site to be a safety issue or priority”. Traffic speed and volume data had been captured by automatic data collectors mounted on existing street lighting columns north of the pedestrian crossing on Malling Street. The data had not been updated to reflect the current situation, but it was considered a useful guide to typical vehicle speeds and volumes. The report stated that: on the basis of the recorded speed data neither ESCC or Sussex Police would consider there to be a speeding issue and given the status of the road, the recorded traffic volumes were “at a level to be expected”. The focus of the commission had been reduction of vehicle speeds and volumes along Malling Hill, and various measures had been proposed. ESH initial response to these was:

Suggested measure	East Sussex Highways’ response
Reduction in Traffic Volume	Not supported by ESCC / Sussex Police
Safety Cameras	Would not meet criteria
Vehicle Activated Signs	Would not meet criteria
Additional speed reminder signage	Legislation would not permit
Pedestrian Crossings	Not achievable based on demand and available space
Traffic Calming*	Typical horizontal and vertical measures are not achievable but option to install central islands could be viable subject to further design
Footway widening / road narrowing north of Orchard Road	This option is viable but expensive

Due to the nature and importance of this A26 route as a part of the strategic road network through East Sussex, diversion of the traffic onto alternative routes would not be supported by either ESCC or the Sussex Police Authority. As such this option could not be considered further.

*Traffic Calming measures were explored in the report, and two options which ESH would contemplate were detailed and costs indicated:

A. A series of central islands between Orchard Road and Church Lane (approx. £80,000) At this stage it was not possible to determine if any further carriageway strengthening was required to facilitate the central islands. There is a risk that by introducing new islands traffic is directed to the edges of the carriageway and experience had that the road can fail if strengthening is not undertaken. This could only be determined as part of the design process.

B. Carriageway narrowing between Orchard Road and Church Lane (approx. £150,000). This estimate included the narrowing of the carriageway by realigning the kerb line along both sides of the A26 over a distance of approximately 700m.

The report concluded with the following statements and recommendations:

- a) "Crash data has been analysed for the site from which it has been determined that there is insufficient evidence to justify a scheme from being promoted.
- b) 34% of recorded vehicle speeds exceeded the 30mph speed limit but the majority of these were recorded as travelling between 31 and 36mph. Only 8.8% of drivers are recorded as exceeding the Police enforcement threshold, which would not be considered a speeding issue by either ESCC or Sussex Police.
- c) Of the options suggested and considered, only two present themselves as a possible way of encouraging driver compliance with the speed limit, the installation of a series of central traffic islands or the physical narrowing of the road between Orchard Road and Church Lane. Traffic islands would be the least expensive option to progress.
- d) All of the other potential ways of reducing vehicle speed and volume have been discounted on the grounds of either being unsupported by ESCC / Sussex Police or not being permitted due to legislation.
- e) Although it cannot be guaranteed that narrowing of the road or the introduction of central islands would have the desired effect on vehicle speeds, the measures should encourage slower speeds."

The committee discussed these conclusions at length, and local residents and others agreed that physically restricting the carriageway was likely to force vehicles (particularly HGV's) toward the kerb and thus increase the sense of vulnerability felt by pedestrians. There was some criticism of the specific location selected as the sampling point for speed data: it was believed to be too close to a crossing where speeds should be expected to be lower. Traffic speed was still considered by the majority of those present to be the worst dimension of the issue. It was suggested that different phasing of the crossing lights might have a beneficial effect.

Conclusions: Consensus was that better enforcement was preferable, while a more refined approach to 'hard' measures could be researched. A town-wide 20mph speed limit was favoured, which would affect all residents. The Malling Hill matter was considered to be specific to the local residents. The report should be shared with the community and there should be consultation with residents on these issues and the calming options presented in the report. Council would be asked to endorse these views.

FC2020/118.5 The Minutes of the meeting of the Transport Committee held on 13th April 2021 are received and noted, and the committee's approach is endorsed as appropriate and sensible.

f) Personnel Panel 16th April 2021: Council considered Notes of this meeting (*copy in minute book*):

The meeting had welcomed Jennifer McNeill of South East Employers (SEEmp), and continued with the work of the recruitment process.

Ten applications had been received, and Members had been furnished with copies of the forms showing details of applicants' skills, qualities, and experience in relation to the

published Job Description and personal specification. Individual panellists had been asked to 'score' these in terms of the evidence presented, with a view to selecting six candidates for interview.

This exercise, and subsequent detailed discussion, was facilitated by Ms McNeill and resulted in seven candidates being identified for further consideration at interview.

It was agreed that all applicants would be immediately advised of the shortlisting outcome, and SEEmp would subsequently issue each interview candidate with the CREDO™ profiling questionnaire and arrange the analysis of these upon return. A briefing note for a ten-minute presentation would be sent separately to each candidate nearer the date of interview, allowing the same preparation time for all. The subject of this presentation was discussed at some length, and a consensus was reached. TC would prepare a briefing note accordingly and collate a draft selection of appropriate questions for Panellists; and circulate these late the following week.

Interviews would be scheduled for approximately 90 minutes each and arranged as: four to be held on Monday 10th May (9:00am; 11:00am; 1:30pm; 3:30pm), and three on Friday 14th May (9:00am; 11:00am; 1:30pm).

Panellists would be sent the CREDO™ analysis reports when available, and a review meeting before interviews was agreed for 4:00pm on Friday 30th April.

It was agreed that Panellists would receive documents for interviews in printed form.

FC2020/118.6 The record of the Personnel Panel meeting held on 21st April 2021 is received and noted, and the Panels' decisions are approved.

FC2020/119

LEWES CLIMATE DAY EVENT:

Council considered a Motion (*NOM18/2020 – copy in minute book*) proposing that the Council agree, with regard to the Lewes Climate Day being planned for 19th September 2021, to

- o nominate a Member or Members of the Town Council to attend planning meetings and report back to the Town Council on progress.
- o support the event through publication on Town Council website, Facebook pages and noticeboards.
- o ask its Commemorations Committee to consider an appropriate Town Council contribution to the event, with prospect of a lasting legacy.

Further information was extracted from a recent request circulated by Juliet Oxborrow, of Lewes Climate Action, who had written:

“A number of groups in Lewes (The Railway Land Wildlife Trust, Extinction Rebellion, Transition Town Lewes, Friends of Lewes and other affiliate groups of Lewes Climate Hub) are getting together to organise a Climate Day at the Linklater Pavilion on Sunday 19th September. We wondered if Lewes Town Council would like to join us as a partner.

“This is intended as a smaller event than the Imagine Festival that you may have heard discussion about (which will now probably take place in Spring 2022 to give us time to raise the £2,000-£3,000 funding needed to do it properly). However, a number of groups feel it's vital to hold something in Lewes in the run-up to the COP26 Climate Summit in Glasgow on 1st-12th November.

“Our event could also be part of the national "Great Big Green Week" (18th- 26th September) that The Climate Coalition is organising [see: <https://greatbiggreenweek.com>]. Perhaps the town council could encourage climate events by groups and organisations in Lewes throughout the week?

Do let us know if LTC would like to support a Climate Day on 19th Sept and if so, which councillors would be happy to join the organising committee. We're planning to have a kick-off meeting in the few weeks to discuss what the day could involve - but can wait to hear from you. Do give me a call if you need more information.” *Juliet Oxborrow*

There followed a brief discussion and subsequently **it was resolved that:**

FC2020/119.1 Lewes Town Council supports Lewes Climate Day being planned for 19th September 2021 and will promote the event on Town Council website, Facebook pages and noticeboards.

FC2020/119.2 Cllrs Catlin, Dr Maples, O’Keeffe and Vernon will attend, on a rotation basis, event planning meetings with other affiliate groups of Lewes Climate Hub and report back to the Town Council on progress

FC2020/119.3 The Council asks its Commemorations Committee to consider suggestions for an appropriate Town Council contribution to the event, with prospect of a lasting legacy.

FC2020/120

‘CONNECTING LEWES’ INITIATIVE:

Council considered a Motion (*NOM19/2020 – copy in minute book*) that Lewes Town Council should express its support for the *Connecting Lewes* project; an initiative that aims to increase digital inclusion in Lewes through mentoring, technological assistance, and financial support.

It was stated that online access is critical to many aspects of everyday living: learning, working, shopping and accessing public services; even more so during recent lockdowns and social distancing. A significant proportion of people were unable to take part in this digital world, because they are elderly, disabled or lack the finances to pay for laptops, phones and wi-fi. These digitally-excluded people, it was said, are amongst the most vulnerable in society and would benefit most from being able to access the Internet and to keep in touch with people via video-conferencing.

Nationally, older and disabled people were most likely to be digitally excluded. Only 65% of people over the age of 65 have used the internet in the last three months and just 85% of disabled people, according to the Office of National Statistics.

There was no reason to believe that Lewes is an exception, especially with its older demographic. A group composed of local charities, GP practices, Town Councillors, East Sussex County Council and Lewes Community Volunteers was aiming to tackle the problem locally. The group, called *Connecting Lewes*, was led by Neville resident Eric Kihlstrom. It had published a questionnaire in the latest issue of Lewes News, which was distributed to all households in the town. Some 200 responses had been received.

Once the need has been established, *Connecting Lewes* would respond with a programme of mentoring, provision of equipment and financial support delivered by the organisations involved in the initiative.

It was resolved that:

FC2020/120.1 Lewes Council expresses its support for the Connecting Lewes project, that aims to increase digital inclusion in Lewes.

FC2020/121

LOCAL BUS SERVICES SUPPORT:

Councillors considered a report and submission by Community Transport for the Lewes Area (CTLA), requesting continued financial assistance (*copy in the Minute Book*). Since 2014 CTLA had successfully worked in partnership with Lewes Town Council to reverse the decline in public transport services of both traditional fixed route and timetabled services and also door-to-door on demand transport.

For the 2020/2021 financial year the Council had agreed to fund £4,000 of £6,000 requested by CTLA to support the Lewes Dial-a-Ride service for a period of 12 months and had agreed to consider a further bid for the year 2021-2022, which was now tabled. During 2021/2022 CTLA was bidding for £4,000 to fund increased hours of operation envisaged to further enhance this service and grow its appeal to even more residents..

FC2020/121.1 Lewes Town Council will support Community Transport for the Lewes Area (CTLA) with a grant of £4,000 in 2021/22 in respect of the Lewes Dial-a-Ride service.

FC2020/122

OUSE VALLEY WAY:

Council considered report (*FCO21/2020-copy in Minute Book*) proposing consideration of a contribution towards improving the surface of the Ouse riverside path on the West bank, North of Willeys Bridge, Lewes.

This was an extremely well-used path which is a designated public right-of-way and forms part of the popular Ouse Valley Way.

Stakeholders including local residents; the Environment Agency (EA); the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA), and Hamsey Parish Council have worked for some years

to secure improvements to the surface, which can be effectively impassable for long periods during wet weather. Photographs were shown which clearly illustrated this.

With reference to the plan appended to the report, sections A to B and C to D had already been improved with all-weather material and this has been well-received. Sections B to C and D to E, however, remained impassable for long periods. Between the EA and SDNPA, improvements had been made with all-weather surfacing and a new field gate replacing a difficult kissing-gate, but around 570 metres of the path remained unimproved.

The surfacing improvements completed so far were costed at approximately £12.30 per metre, which suggested the remaining length might cost around £7,000, although a higher standard was desirable, to include a sub-base to resist damage by cattle. This would cost roughly £20,000.

To achieve these improvements to the route, the EA, SDNPA and Hamsey Parish Council were prepared to contribute funds, and Lewes Town Council was asked to join with this endeavour.

The Environment Agency continued their flood bank repair works at Landport when weather and other constraints allowed it. Their primary concern was that these banks are part of the protection for the railway, Landport, Talbot terrace and the North Street Quarter areas.

The scope of that work was:

- a) Raising of the low sections of the bank back to their original design height, using the material that is already onsite.
- b) Topping the finished surface with a Granite 'MoT type 1' granular aggregate to protect the top of the bank and increase its life.
- c) Assisting SDNPAs and Hamsey PC's ambition in connecting the footpaths for all to use.
- d) Planting trees in certain locations, either along the berm or in fields nearby subject to the land-owners permission.

It was also their intention to start a section from the railway bridge up to the next gate (Offham Sluice) using the natural products that are there, *ie* trees, and lay them in a green engineering solution. This should create a 'live' bank repair and increase habitat in that section. The EA's Adur Catchment Officer had noted that with all these projects the raw look of the works once finished could look a little 'daunting' but was confident that once the grass established and the material settled and weathered, it blended well with its environment.

There followed a general debate on the principles and subsequently **it was resolved that**

FC2020/122.1 Lewes Town Council supports in principle the request for a contribution towards further improvements to the surface of the Ouse Valley Way North of Willeys Bridge, subject to detailed and costed proposals for a sustainable all-weather surface, robust and resistant to disturbance by cattle *etc*, being developed by the partner organizations.

FC2020/123

COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER:

Council considered a proposed amendment to the staffing establishment, to recruit a part time Communications Officer. This would in effect be an alteration to the duties of a post currently vacant due to the promotion of the previous part-time Receptionist/Administration Officer at the Town Hall. The effect was budget-neutral as the current vacant post was graded at an appropriate level.

A Job Description and Personal Specification was considered. The postholder's main purpose would be to ensure the routine provision of information and the communication and promotion of the Council's functions, facilities and services, and to assist and inform public engagement with the Council's operational, civic, statutory and democratic functions.

FC2020/123.1 The staff establishment is amended to adapt the currently-vacant Reception and Administration Officer post to the role of Communications Officer, with the Job Description and Personal Specification as presented to Council on 29th April 2021 (*copy in the Minute Book*).

FC2020/124

UPDATE ON MATTERS IN PROGRESS:

An update on progress with the Annual Plan was distributed (copy in minute book) and TC elaborated on various salient points.

Phoenix (North Street Quarter) redevelopment: the new owners of the land were expected to hold public engagement events on the site once Covid restrictions allowed, and a clear picture should then emerge as to a timetable for planning applications. Projects on-hold as they are significantly affected by these plans would be assessed as the scenario developed.

Malling Community Centre: Practical completion of the building had been signed-off on 26th March, with a ‘snagging’ list of items to be addressed in coming weeks. The building contractors had dedicated a ‘snagging manager’ who would liaise with LTC staff to achieve a satisfactory completion. It was now possible to arrange such aspects as the alarm monitoring contract; telephones; hygiene services, amended licensing *etc.* and these were in-hand. A meeting of the MCC Steering Group would be called in due course, to determine fees & charges, and catering proposals *etc.* It was hoped that the Centre could be operational when Covid restrictions were lifted, and a ‘Grand’ opening event might follow a little later in the year. Members were asked to pass enquiries to Hannah and Faye, and an email address was in place (mallingscentre@lewes-tc.gov.uk). A mobile telephone number was available and although this would eventually become the emergency phone.

Devolution: It had been rumoured that Lewes District Council might be re-opening the offer of sale to the Town Council of the Market Tower. TC reported that there had been no change to their officially-stated position, which was that the offer was withdrawn.

Bus shelter – South Downs Road: In answer to a Member’s question, TC advised that one of two bus shelters in South Downs Road, recently transferred to the Town Council as a planning gain, had been destroyed by impact with a delivery vehicle. Fortunately, the event had been captured on video by cameras installed on the adjacent building development site and the footage had been provided. The driver had returned to the scene and there was no denial of liability, so the matter was with the company’s insurers. A replacement would be installed in due course.

FC2020/125

NOTICE of ITEMS IN PROSPECT

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

- > Support for CTLA Dial-a-Ride service
- > Malling Hill traffic investigations

Dates to note etc for forthcoming meetings and events were:

- > The next cycle of applications (Cycle 1 of 4) to the Council’s grants programme had a deadline for applications (now online-only) of 21st May 2021 with an online meeting of the Grant Panel on Weds 2nd June to formulate recommendations to Council on 24th June.
- > The next meeting of Council would be Mayor-making – WEDNESDAY 5th May at 7:30pm.
- > The next ‘ordinary’ Council meeting would take place on Thursday 24th June 2021 at 7:30pm, with a deadline for agenda items to reach TC by noon on Monday 14th June.

FC2020/126

REMOTE (‘Virtual’) MEETINGS – Expiry of emergency Regulations

Councillors had been provided with an update on the status of the emergency regulations that allowed local authorities to hold meetings remotely. These applied only to meetings that were required to be held, or held, before 7 May 2021 which meant that without any further action from the government, all councils faced a return to face to face meetings from 7 May, despite this being inconsistent with general guidance and other legislation on the Covid-19 situation. The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and most other representative organizations working in local government continued to press the government to extend the regulations beyond this date and stress the urgency and importance of this issue.

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, had said that: whilst accepting that the provision has been successful, he had no plans to extend the date “...as it requires primary legislation and there is no vehicle to do that in time for May”. He added that whilst it was “not possible” at the moment, if there was opportunity to make it more permanent, he would take it.

An application had been made to the High Court by the Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO); Lawyers in Local Government (LLG), and Hertfordshire County Council, in relation to the dilemma but this had been dismissed on 28th April.

The court had concluded that:

"... the Secretary of State was correct in November 2016 and July 2019 to say that primary legislation would be required to allow local authority "meetings" under the 1972 Act to take place remotely. In our view, once the Flexibility Regulations cease to apply, such meetings must take place at a single, specified geographical location; attending a meeting at such a location means physically going to it; and being "present" at such a meeting involves physical presence at that location. We recognise that there are powerful arguments in favour of permitting remote meetings. But, as the consultation documents show, there are also arguments against doing so. The decision whether to permit some or all local authority meetings to be conducted remotely, and if so, how, and subject to what safeguards, involves difficult policy choices on which there is likely to be a range of competing views. These choices have been made legislatively for Scotland by the Scottish Parliament and for Wales by the Senedd. In England, they are for Parliament, not the courts".

In view of the level of support for the option of remote meetings LLG and ADSO were very disappointed at the decision of the court to refuse to support the updated interpretation proposed, which would have enabled councils to continue providing the option of remote attendance. Their energy, and the momentum that had been generated, would now be directed into lobbying government to quickly bring forward the necessary legislation to overcome this impasse and to ensure that councils have local choice to determine the mode of meetings not just during the pandemic, but for the long term.

Advice on best practice remained that all local councils should continue to meet remotely while the regulations are in force. It was recommended that where possible, the annual meeting was scheduled while the current Regulations permit for them to be held remotely. The Council had rescheduled to allow for this, and Mayormaking was to take place on Wednesday 5th May.

TC explained the implications for the Council and individual Councillors if meetings were held that were technically unlawful. Although many of the meetings held could be argued to be advisory, where challenge to any decisions would not be possible, there was a requirement for Councillors to "attend" (as defined by the High Court judgement) at least one meeting of a committee or outside body to which they had been appointed by Council, within six months or they would automatically lose office (*s85 Local Government Act 1972*). The current remote meeting had been moved to be as late as possible in April so that councillors who were unable/unwilling to attend face-to-face meetings would have as much time as possible before disqualification by virtue of the "six-month rule".

The next meeting was scheduled for 24th June, by which time it was hoped that Covid restrictions would ease, although this was likely to be held in the Corn Exchange where greater social distancing was possible, and ventilation was better.

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

The meeting ended at 10.00pm

Signed: Date:

Draft