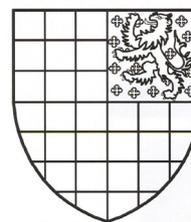


Town Hall
High Street
Lewes
East Sussex
BN7 2QS

☎ 01273 471469 Fax: 01273 480919

✉ info@lewes-tc.gov.uk

🌐 www.lewes-tc.gov.uk



**LEWES
TOWN
COUNCIL**

MINUTES

Of the meeting of **Lewes Town Council**,
held on **Thursday 19th December 2019**, in the **Council Chamber, Town Hall, Lewes** 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; R O'Keeffe; S Sains; J Vernon; R Waring and K Wood.

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

Observing: Mr B Courage (*Town Ranger*) Ms J Dean (*Customer Services Officer*) Ms V McLachlan (*Finance Administration Officer*) and Mr L Symons (*Town Hall Manager*).

The Council's Chaplain, Canon Richard Moatt, offered a few words before commencement of the meeting, reflecting on comparisons between historic and modern views on changes in society attributed to communications technology.

FC2019/78 QUESTION TIME: There were two members of the public present. A written question had been received in relation to proportionate capacity and income for the All Saints Centre and Town Hall. The question, and the answer given, are appended to these minutes.

FC2019/79 MEMBERS DECLARATIONS of INTERESTS: There were none.

FC2019/80 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr M Milner who was working.

It was resolved that:

FC2019/80.1 Reasons submitted for absence from this meeting are noted.

The Mayor reminded Members that it was mandatory to offer reasons when submitting apologies for absence from meetings, and also that late changes having accepted invitations to attend catered events caused waste of food and money.

FC2019/81 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS:

a) On Friday 20th December Lewes Concert Orchestra would be playing in the Assembly Room, Town Hall and Lewes Youth Band would be playing at St Michael's Church. Both events would start at 7.30pm.

b) Following this years' Bonfire celebrations, Sussex Police, on behalf of the Bonfire Safety Group have issued an invitation to a Stakeholders and Councillors' Debrief at Southover House (Lewes District Council offices) on 24th January between 10:00 and 12:00. Members were asked to let TC know if they wished to register to attend.

FC2019/82 MINUTES:

It was resolved that:

FC2019/82.1 Minutes of the Council meeting held on 7th November 2019 are received and signed as an accurate record.

FC2019/83 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) Personnel Panel 27th November 2019: Council considered the minutes of this meeting:

Panel Members had each received direct from an ex-Councillor, a copy of a complaint arising from the independent investigator's report on a grievance raised by a member of

staff, which had been considered earlier this year. The investigation had been conducted by the director of the South East Employers organization; one of nine regional employers' organisations in England specialising in local government Human Resources matters. The Panel's resulting report and recommendations had been considered by Council, and agreed, on 25th July 2019.

The complaint had been sent direct by the complainant to Panellists, following the individual's receipt of a redacted copy of the report. A number of points were cited disputing the validity of conclusions reached, and the reasoning expounded by the investigator; it was suggested that the Council should not have commissioned the investigator due to an alleged close connection to another Councillor who practised in the same professional field. In considering this complaint the Panellists heard advice obtained from the Council's solicitor.

Members of the Panel recognized the complainant's strength of feeling and acknowledged their sense of injustice; however, the complaint was seen as not capable of resolution by the Council. It complained of matters which should properly be raised with the investigator or their professional Institute. It was noted the investigator was a Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development and a practitioner in a specialist field.

From the perspective of the Council: Panel members had the benefit of professional advice from the Council's solicitor on the matter and agreed that there was no reason that Council should not have engaged the investigator. The Council is a subscriber to the South East Employers organization and the consultant is a highly experienced investigator operating in a relatively small field. Prior acquaintance with a fellow professional was no bar to commission by the Council for this work. It was not agreed that there was any evidence of bias, and it was commented that whilst it is legitimate to disagree with an investigator's conclusions or reasoning, this does not make them wrong. The Panel had considered the investigator's report across many hours, with the meeting advised by a solicitor during the entirety of the deliberations and adjourned twice to accommodate this and, in the final analysis, they did not promote all the investigator's conclusions in their own report to Council. The Panel's views and recommendations were presented to Council in July and were accepted, and the matter was now considered to be closed.

The solicitor's opinion was that: as the professional integrity of the investigator had been impugned, it was right that they be informed, and Members agreed that a copy of the complaint should be forwarded.

Members were agreed that a letter to the complainant describing their consideration of the complaint and conclusions, as outlined above, should be drafted by the Chair and TC.

Town Clerk appraisal scheme

Panellists considered the list of individuals and organizations external to the Council, who had previously been invited to complete a questionnaire. These were in two categories – those who had a continuing relationship with the Council through TC and those who had featured in the past year for a particular reason (*eg liaison during a project*). The latter list was effectively discounted, with no replacements suggested. The “routine” list was discussed, and four additions agreed. It was suggested that any further suggestions should be made by email in the next few days, as instructions would be issued shortly to the independent consultant who facilitated the appraisal scheme, with a request that he produce a report for consideration by the Panel in February.

Review of staff establishment/ 'Visioning' support

Members had considered the Town Clerk's report (*Special001/2019 – confidential to Councillors*) which was intended to highlight key factors affecting any consideration of future staffing and administrative structure. This would be presented to all Councillors and introduced at the 'Visioning' evening the following day, but it was noted that the report recommended that the Personnel Panel should be tasked with significant areas of work. The number of staff members, and their individual roles, who were eligible to retire either before the next Council elections or within one year afterward would significantly impact upon the Council. This would bring both opportunities and difficulties, and it was

recommended that Members carefully consider the structure they wish the Council to adopt and take key decisions as to recruitment/retention as soon as possible.

Members were encouraged to read and appreciate the background information, before considering suggestions for action. The report touched upon a range of issues affecting future staffing and warned Members that recruitment would be set against a national backdrop of local government pay and conditions that made parish council employment unattractive to many people.

Affecting the Panel specifically, the report recommended that Council immediately tasks the Personnel Panel to work with TC on the following priorities:

- › Succession for TC: to formulate initial recommendations for Council by Easter 2020. This should include careful consideration of a 'split' between TC & RFO functions and the matter of a new TC-designate being recruited significantly in advance of TC's retirement to better engage with further successions and staff structuring.
- › It was recommended that once a job description and person specification are drafted, these are submitted for an independent professional evaluation as to appropriate grading, for consistency with the exercise carried out in 2016 for the main staff body and to ensure correct positioning in the sector job-market.
- › Engagement with those individuals who will attain state retirement eligibility either before or within the year following the next scheduled elections in May 2023.
- › Recommendations related to any additional posts envisaged, which may arise from 'Visioning' exercises, and alterations to the established staff structure that may be proposed.

It was resolved that:

FC2019/83.1 The Minutes of the Personnel Panel (*copy in minute book*) held on 27th November are received and noted. Council notes the matter of the complaint received, and the Panel's response, and the approach taken to other matters considered at the meeting. It confirms the Panel's remit to deal with specific matters noted in *Report Special001/2019* and itemized in this Minute.

FC2019/83.2 It was requested that the minutes repeat the fundamental principle that Councillors consider and determine policy and officers advise upon and implement policy.

b) Devolution Working Party 29th November 2019: Council considered the minutes of this meeting:

Members had considered a report (*DevWp001/2019, copy in the Minute Book*) that covered the Town Council's history with regard to devolution; an update on the current status, and indications of future prospects. Appended to this were copies of a recent Lewes District Council (LDC) Cabinet report and associated revised Policy on property disposal and transfer. Also provided was a briefing note describing transfers to the Town Council by LDC since 1995, and descriptions of improvements introduced since acquisition.

The Town Council had registered requests, in June 2018, for the terms upon which it might acquire ownership of LDC's redundant premises at No.2 Fisher Street, Lewes, and also the market Tower, Market Street, Lewes. LDC had also been asked to consider terms upon which the Town Council might assume the Trusteeship of the Convent Field Trust, including the off-street carpark, and the Town Council had indicated that it may be interested to assume the Trusteeship of the Stanley Turner Trust.

LDC had indicated freehold values for the two buildings which could form the basis of a discussion. Working Party Members were encouraged that the recently revised LDC property disposal policy now gave appropriate recognition to principles of community asset transfer and the long-standing statutory "general Consent" (*Circular 06/03: Local Government Act 1972 general disposal consent [England] 2003*) which allowed disposal of property for up to £2M less than its valuation.

It was explained that the terms of this mean that specific Ministerial consent is not required for the disposal of any interest in land which LDC considers will "help it to secure the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of its

area". LDC should also have regard to their community strategy and could rely upon the well-being criteria in the Local Government Act 2000 when considering disposals at less than best value. It was for LDC to agree on such decisions, but disposal at less than best value was possible provided that the undervalue does not exceed £2,000,000 (two million). Transfer of Trusteeship was a straightforward matter, and it was understood that LDC had obtained an opinion from the Charity Commissioners indicating that they would not see it necessary to impose any conditions or complexity such as a Commissioners' Scheme or Order, but the two parties were able to simply agree legal transfer. With regard to the Stanley Turner ground; the resident sports clubs had long held aspirations to independently manage the maintenance of the playing surfaces and facilities and had expressed hopes that this might be agreed under LTC trusteeship. There were several questions related to the Convent Field: the precise boundaries were not known, and LDC's position regarding the off-street carpark and status of Lewes Football Club were issues to be established.

The Working Party discussed these matters at some length, and several practical questions arose as to the future management of any acquisitions and wider concerns such as staff resources and accommodation. It was acknowledged that further acquisition of open spaces would eventually reach a tipping-point where direct employment of dedicated staff would be advantageous, but in the immediate future there were considerations such as the need to recognize the existing LDC contract for grounds maintenance.

It was resolved that:

FC2019/83.3 The Minutes of the Devolution Working Party (*copy in minute book*) held on 29th November 2019 are noted.

FC2019/83.4 *Market Tower and No.2 Fisher Street* – Council should indicate an agreement in-principle to proceed with acquisition of freehold title, subject to further detailed negotiations, notably regarding community value and future use.

Stanley Turner Trust – Council should indicate an agreement in-principle to proceed with a transfer of Trusteeship, and simultaneously ask the 'resident' sports clubs to prepare their case for a future independent management agreement. LDC should be commissioned to continue as manager of day-to-day operations in the short term, under an agreement similar to that concluded regarding Landport Bottom.

Convent Field - Council should indicate an agreement in-principle to a transfer of Trusteeship, but subject to consideration of further detail regarding aspects such as the status of Lewes FC and the off-street carpark; that consideration to be in the short term.

c) Landport Bottom Management Committee 4th December 2019: Council considered the Minutes of this meeting:

Members had considered a report (*FC017/2018, copy in the Minute Book*) which had originally been presented to Council in March 2019. The report provided a summary history of the site since its purchase, jointly with Lewes District Council (LDC), in 1992 and the reasons for the formation of the present committee following the Council's acquisition of sole ownership in 2018. It was explained that day-to-day operations on the land continued to be overseen by LDC's Specialist Adviser (Downland & Nature Reserves), as before the transfer; now under a formal agreement with LDC retaining their services.

There followed a general discussion which led to a focus on priorities. It was acknowledged that the current Management Plan should be updated as it was a third revision, conducted in 2006, of a plan originally adopted ten years earlier. It was still relevant in many ways, but a comprehensive review was appropriate. LDC's Specialist Adviser agreed to prepare an update by Easter 2020 for consideration by the committee. It was requested that this should include a section on operational policies.

The Specialist Adviser explained some of the background to operations on the land, relating biodiversity and decisions such as grazing (type; frequency; location *etc*). The land was entered into a Higher-Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme, and there were specified methods for species surveys *etc*. The HLS agreement expires in 2021, and extension must

be applied-for within one year of expiry, so that question would need to be addressed in Spring 2020. It was agreed that a meeting be held on that subject in February.

In the past, several surveys had been conducted using consultants and there was a body of reference material obtained since the land was first returned to chalk grassland from arable crops; in 1992. Lewes District Council intended to enter, with partners, a Nature Improvement Area project to increase downland grass areas, and this would involve further data gathering and surveys of species such as newts and Skylarks. A *Changing Chalk* project may allow the engagement of dedicated staff and would cover downland between Lewes and Eastbourne. There were opportunities for “citizen science” although managed projects were desirable, and the Friends of Landport Bottom may engage in such exercises.

In the context of the objective to promote “quiet informal enjoyment” by the public, questions arose around various issues such as sheep-worrying and conflict between horse riders and other users of the land; a number of occasional, but recurring problems. Also the dilemma of dog-fouling, given that the area was intended to remain as open Downland and waste bins were themselves undesirable in great numbers. It was felt that a compromise position should be possible, and the matter of location and any practical constraints for additional bins would be researched. Members were keenly aware that the land was intended for general public access, and its position on the urban fringe brought several dilemmas for daily management.

A question was posed as to the effectiveness of post-Bonfire site cleaning by the two Societies who hired the land. It was stated that ‘clean-up’ may not appear as thorough as in the past, but this was attributed largely to changes of personnel within the societies. There was a principle in place to retain payments to support additional remediation work, and both The LDC Specialist Adviser and the Town Council’s Town Ranger felt that the system was reasonably practical. It was suggested that the user license could be discussed in February when reviewing the HLS extension option

It was resolved that:

FC2019/83.5 The Minutes of the Landport Bottom Management Committee (*copy in minutes book*) are noted.

d) Grants Panel 4th December 2019: Members considered report FC013/2019 (*copy in minute book*) containing recommendations for payments of grants for the third cycle (of four) for the year 2019/20.

It was resolved that:

FC2019/83.6 The grant payments recommended in report FC013/2019 (as shown in column G of the table appended to that report) be approved.

e) Amendment to Councillors’ individual duties: Report FC0014/2019 (*copy in minute book*). was received, regarding changes to Members’ appointed individual duties.

It was resolved that:

FC2019/83.7 The individual responsibilities of Members for the remainder of the 2019/20 municipal year shall be amended as:

Cllr Dr Maples be appointed to the Devolution Working Party.

f) Finance Working Party 16th December 2019: Councillors received a brief oral report on this meeting, which had taken place earlier that week. Minutes would be available at the next Council meeting, but meanwhile it was helpful to remind members that the current visioning exercise would be likely to affect budgeting, and the base budget that had been agreed at the meeting would be refined in light of that before presentation to Council. It was seen as important that, once agreed, the budget was presented to the public in an easily-accessible way such as the ‘infographic’ on the website public notices page.

It was resolved that:

FC2019/83.8 The oral report on the meeting of the Finance Working Party on 16th December 2019 is noted.

FC2019/84 HIGH STREET PAVING:

Council considered a Motion (NOM015/2019) that proposed Lewes Town Council should support the principle of repairing the pavement near the Crown Court to restore the pavements there and remove the temporary patches of tarmac, and of installing bollards to protect the pavement from further damage by vehicles being parked on it.

It was also suggested that this project could be discussed by the Transport Committee at its next meeting with a view to suggestions coming back to Council if it appears that an application for funding to the Town Council would be supported, once the full details are known.

The Friends of Lewes, the Town's Civic Society, had campaigned for many years for bollards to enable pavement restoration, and over time there had been more and more patches of temporary repair giving the area an unfortunate patchwork look. It was suggested that East Sussex Highways may be persuaded that the scheme would be suitable for a community match scheme application if local support could be demonstrated, and support in-principle from the Town Council would help at this point.

At a later date it may be that some funding from Lewes Town Council would be sought, but this was not the purpose of the present motion; it was to secure support in-principle to a project based on these ideas, and for an examination by the Transport Committee of what the project would entail in more detail.

It was resolved that:

FC2019/84.1 Lewes Town Council supports the principle of repairing the pavement near the Crown Court to restore the pavements there and remove the temporary "black top" patches of tarmac; and of installing bollards to protect the pavement from further damage by vehicles parked on it.

FC2019/84.2 The Transport Committee is asked to consider this matter with a view to formulating recommendations to Council regarding support funding, once the full details are known.

FC2019/85 SUSTAINABILITY AUDIT:

Council considered a Motion (NOM016/2019) that proposed Lewes Town Council should implement a Sustainability Audit for Town Council Buildings.

It was stated that choices in energy, water, waste, food and procurement impact significantly on local greenhouse gas emissions. Lewes Town Council had a responsibility to its local community to lead by example and to ensure that it was managing and informing these choices in clear, responsible and sustainable way.

It was proposed that a Sustainability Audit be carried out by a third party on the Town Hall and All Saints Centre, as the primary buildings in the estate, and that Council consider these findings as part of a future Sustainability Policy. In order to understand the scope of sustainability possible, a baseline audit would be needed to assess current actions on energy, water, waste, food and procurement in these buildings.

The baseline data would be presented along with recommendations on sustainability improvements and a headline greenhouse gas figure as part of a Sustainability Audit Report. It was suggested that the Council's UN Sustainable Goals Working Party could then use this audit to inform any forthcoming recommendations and draft a Sustainability Policy.

It was resolved that:

FC2019/85.1 Lewes Town Council agrees to implement a Sustainability Audit for Town Council Buildings.

FC2019/86 ASSESSMENT of FUNDING REQUESTS:

Council considered a Motion (NOM17/2019) which aimed to ensure consistent practice in decision making with regard to miscellaneous grants and other funding requests. It was suggested that this would need a clear set of criteria for funding, set against the Town Council's agreed priorities, and demonstration of scrutiny against agreed criteria when assessing any application for funding.

It was proposed that the Audit committee, working with the Town Clerk, should create a systematic assessment process that indicates clearly to applicants and to Councillors the Council's priorities in awarding funding and that requires applicants to indicate how their project/activity or event directly supports or enhances these. Further: recipients of sums of over £2000 would be expected to present results following their use of public funds.

Reference was made to the process by which miscellaneous grants were assessed in the cyclical applications scheme. This compares applications with the aims of the grant scheme and members of the grants Panel individually consider the extent to which an application meets criteria to benefit the community, and demonstrates appropriate planning; practicality/robustness and financial prudence *etc.* Each application is then discussed on its merits by the Panel and a recommended award is agreed.

For a number of *ad hoc* proposals, which often involve larger sums, the applicant may be asked to make a presentation about their proposal, the decision-making process that guides Town Council funding is less clear.

It was resolved that:

FC2019/86.1 The Audit Panel is asked to draft a clear set of criteria and assessment process, along similar lines to that employed by the Grants Panel, by which all applications for funding will be assessed if falling outside the established miscellaneous grants scheme. The process shall include provision for any organisation receiving a grant over £2000 be requested to give a report (based upon a standard template) or a short presentation as appropriate.

FC2019/87

LOCAL BUS SERVICE SUPPORT:

Councillors considered a report and submission for continued financial support by Community Transport for the Lewes Area (CTLA). 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.

During the current financial year Lewes Town Council provided a contribution comprised of subsidy towards the Lewes Dial a Ride; Bus services 131 and 132; and support for publicity and marketing promotions. The latest bid by CTLA was for a three-year term as this would assist with forward budgeting and planning.

During 2020/2021 CTLA was bidding for £14,000 comprised of:

- i) £6,000 contribution towards the Lewes DaR (to reflect longer operating hours)
- ii) £2,100 provision of 131 Bus service
- iii) £4,500 provision of 132 Bus service
- iv) £1,400 Publicity and Marketing promotions.

To allow for inflation and other operating cost rises CTLA were asking the Town Council to increment the annual amount to £14,420 in the financial Year 2021/2022 (year 2 of the term) and £14,840 in 2022/2023 (year 3 of the term), payable annually in advance on 1st April of each year.

There was some debate on the details provided, and the nature of the services, and

It was resolved that:

FC2019/87.1 Lewes Town Council will support Community Transport for the Lewes Area (CTLA) with a grant of £8,000 in 2020/21 towards the provision of the 131 and 132 bus service in the Town and publicity *etc (shown as items ii); iii) and iv) in the Minute).* This grant to be inflated to £8,240 in 2021/22 and £8487 in 2022/23. Provision to be funded from the project Reserve established for the purpose and identified as P7 in the Council's published accounts.

FC2019/87.2 Lewes Town Council will support Community Transport for the Lewes Area (CTLA) with a grant of £4,000 (two thirds of the £6,000 requested) for the Dial a Ride service with the proviso that CTLA seek the balance from other Parishes benefitting from the service. This payment will be for one year (2020/21) and be reviewed in the light of prevailing circumstances. The sum to be funded from the project Reserve established for the purpose and identified as P7 in the Council's published accounts.

URGENT TREE WORKS:

Following a presentation on woodland management and Ash dieback at the last Meeting of Council Members were now furnished with an update, by Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Council's Specialist Advisor (Arboriculture). There had been, earlier that day, a site visit regarding the situation in Lewes Town and the trees affected by ash dieback which were in the Town Council's ownership; located next to the A275, Offham Road. This had been attended by several expert advisers, local people and Councillors, and was followed by a briefing at the Town Hall. It was generally apparent that those attending recognized, albeit reluctantly, the need for the recommended felling programme and policy of "wait and see" recommended for the following few years. It was remarked that the expert advice had been helpful, and that there was reassurance regarding future treatment of the land. It was welcomed that understorey vegetation would be retained and that decisions as to the removal of trees would be more nuanced than at first expected. Sensitivity to ecological impacts was obvious and reassuring.

It was hoped that the first phase of tree removals on the A275 could be scheduled during the school half term holiday (February 17 to 21). Road closures would only be in place during daylight hours, and the peak commuter period from 4pm should not be affected.

Residents, businesses, parish councils, wildlife groups and schools in the area would be contacted with details of the project. Updates would be posted on social media etc.

A limited amount of timber would be left in place to provide habitat for insects, birds and other flora and fauna although most of the dead trees would be taken to a biomass facility to produce combustible fuel pellets. Revenue received from the timber could help offset the cost of the operation. Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Council's officers would manage the programme (having significantly larger areas of affected trees to be dealt-with) and had obtained tenders from appropriately qualified contractors. The successful tender identified the cost attributable to the Town Council land, although there would be additional costs of traffic management and publicity *etc.* which were not yet defined. The overall cost to Lewes Town Council for its share of the work was estimated to be in the region of £35,000.

It was resolved that:

FC2019/88.1 Lewes Town Council accepts the proposals by Lewes District Council to deal with trees on Town Council land which are affected by Ash die-back disease, alongside their own programme, and agrees to share the cost in the proportion identified in the successful tender for the work, and ancillary cost insofar as it relates to the Town Council's area.

LOCAL ELECTRICITY BILL:

Council had received a request from Power for People, a not-for-profit campaigning organization promoting community-scale renewable energy.

The Council was asked to join several Parish and Community Councils that had already resolved to support a proposed Local Electricity Bill, presented by a cross-party group of 115 members of the recently-dissolved Parliament.

The Bill, if made law, would empower local communities to sell local generated clean energy directly to local customers by establishing a statutory Right to Local Supply. This was currently impossible because of the huge setup and running costs involved in doing so.

The ultimate result of this was said to be:

- > Local communities and businesses could buy their electricity from a local energy company.
- > Building more local renewable energy would be financially viable.
- > Communities would benefit from the revenues that new local energy supply companies would generate, such as more local skilled jobs, energy efficiency schemes and investment in local facilities.

After a brief discussion **it was resolved that:**

FC2019/89.1 Lewes Town Council notes that the Local Electricity Bill:

- › Aims to address the current situation, whereby the very large financial setup and running costs involved in selling locally generated renewable electricity to local customers result in it being impossible for local renewable electricity generators to do so,
- › If made law, would make these financial costs proportionate to the scale of a renewable electricity supplier's operation and therefore empower councils, together with their communities, to sell locally generated renewable electricity directly to local people, businesses and organisations, and
- › Would result in council or community organisations that set up local renewable electricity companies receiving revenues that could be used to help fund local greenhouse gas emissions reduction measures and to help improve local service and facilities; and

FC2019/89.2 Lewes Town Council resolves to support the Local Electricity Bill, promoted by a cross-party group of 115 MPs during the 2017-19 Parliamentary session.

FC2019/90 UPDATE ON MATTERS IN PROGRESS

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

FC2019/91 NOTICE of ITEMS IN PROSPECT

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

The CTLA bus services support, and the proposed Sustainability Audit.

Dates to note were given as:

- Council offices would close at 12:00noon on 24th December and reopen at 9:00am on Thursday 2nd January 2020.
- The next Member's Surgery would be between 10am – 12noon on Tuesday 7th January in the Corn Exchange. Cllrs Lamb and Wood volunteered to attend.
- The next Planning Committee meeting would be at 7pm on Tuesday 14th January.
- The next deadline for grants applications (cycle 4 of 4) would be 24th January, for a Panel sitting on 5th February and Council decision on 27th February. If Members knew of any organisation who may be planning to apply, they were asked to draw their attention to these dates (all 4 cycles were on the cover of the Application Pack, available at the Town Hall reception desk or on the website).
- The next Council meeting would take place on Thursday 23rd January 2020 at 7:30pm, with a deadline for agenda items to reach TC by noon on Monday 13th January.
- The final phase of the 'visioning' exercise would be held at 6.45pm on Wednesday 15th January in the Council Chamber, with refreshments available from 6.00pm.
- Selection of a Mayor-elect and Deputy Mayor-elect for the 2020-21 municipal year would be an item on the Council agenda for the meeting on 23rd January 2020.
- Setting of the Council Tax Precept would be an item on the Council agenda for the meeting on 23rd January 2020.

There being no further business the Mayor closed the meeting; thanked everyone for their contributions and invited all present to join him in the Mayor's Parlour for refreshments

The meeting ended at 9.20 pm

Signed:

Date:



QUESTION RECEIVED:

Received from Tony Rowell at 11:35am on 17th December 2019:

Dear Chair of the Finance Working Party

The budgeted income from Fees and Charges for the All Saints and the Town Hall for the year ending 31 March 2020 are £52,000 and £97,800 respectively.

I attach a spreadsheet that has calculated the occupancy of each premises to be 39.15% and 14.12% based upon these figures. By occupancy rate I mean the percentage that the rooms and spaces are let out based upon the income generated as against the total income that could be generated. I have not included some income in these figures which are ad hoc such as for weddings, stage hire etc (see spreadsheet). assumptions are as set out in the spreadsheet.

I have not calculated the additional costs to let the premises out for longer.

If the premises were let out at only 50% this would generate an additional £14,410 at All Saints and £248,444 at the Town Hall. Even if occupancy only increased to 30% at the Town Hall this would still be an additional income of £100,000 which could mean keeping the precept down.

My questions are

1. Will the Council undertake an in depth audit to establish the actual use of each building.
2. Will the Council establish business plans for each building to ensure they are being used to the optimal capacity and establish what the income and expenditure in such a scenario looks like.
3. Will the Council then set budget figures based upon these business plans.

Regards

Tony Rowell
Green Party
for the common good

ANSWER:

Thank you for your enquiry and, although the answers to your questions are not strictly within the remit of the Finance Working Party, I hope I have covered them:

1. Audit of use:

I have consulted officers and colleagues and I am afraid your theoretical assumptions have given misleading results. As an example: the Council's All Saints Centre Steering Group routinely receives an analysis of hired hours, and the most recent meeting in September 2019 saw that the present hire-hours rate is around 56% for the main hall and 45% for the small hall, although in real terms these are considered near to optimal capacities as allowance must be made for such things as setting-up/dismantling of seating and equipment between different types of use, or activities that are not paid hires – such as the Council's own Toy Library.

The buildings are used far more by community groups and not-for-profit organizations than by commercial users. As I'm sure you will be aware, a major consideration each year when setting fees and charges is the potential impact upon the community sector who rely upon the availability and affordability of these facilities for their existence and we will keep this in mind. We will also consider an annual audit of use based on the analysis received by our working groups.

2. Business plans for the buildings:

The Council is in the process of establishing its priorities for the future, in an extended 'visioning' exercise, and the community buildings will play an essential role in the final forward plan. What may be

decided as to their operations will be considered in that context. In addition we may well decide to review business plans for all Town Council venues.

3. Budget figure plans:

As I believe you once acted as Chair of the Finance Working Party and were a member of the Council when it agreed the budgets and underlying assumptions for the year ending on 31st March 2020, you will know that the Council establishes its budgets annually based upon realistic assumptions as to expenditure and income for the year ahead, and I understand that these have consistently proved accurate over many years. Again; any changes that may ensue from the current visioning discussions will be considered by Council and accommodated in due course. At the same time, we will always seek the best balance between the use of the precept and the income potential of our buildings, to guarantee the best possible service for local residents.

Cllr Oli Henman

Chair, Finance Working party 2019/20