



## ***MINUTES***

Of the meeting of **Lewes Town Council**,  
held on **Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2020**, in the **Council Chamber, Town Hall, Lewes** at **7:30pm**.

**PRESENT** Cllrs J Baah; M Bird; R Burrows; S Catlin (Wischhusen); G Earl; R Handy; O Henman; J Herbert; J Lamb; I Makepeace; Dr W Maples; M Milner; R O’Keeffe; S Sains; 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 L Symons (*Town Hall Manager*).

The council’s Chaplain, Canon Richard Moatt, offered a few words before commencement of the meeting, referring to the recent World Economic Summit in Davos-Kloster, Switzerland. It had been noted that: reflecting on a host of global threats, “words must be replaced by actions”.

**FC2019/92 QUESTION TIME:** There were 5 members of the public present. There were no questions.

**FC2019/93 MEMBERS DECLARATIONS of INTERESTS:** Cllr O’Keeffe declared an interest in the item *re* Lewes Priory in that she is a Trustee of the Lewes Priory Trust.

**FC2019/94 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mayhew and Vernon who were unwell and Cllr Waring who was travelling to Scotland.

**It was resolved that:**

**FC2019/94.1** Reasons submitted for absence from this meeting are noted.

**FC2019/95 MAYOR’S ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

a) Members had been circulated an update from Maria Caulfield MP giving an update on key issues:

A submission had gone to Government to fund improvements to the A27 from the Southerham roundabout to Polegate. This would aim to dual the road but also introduce better cycling and walking provision. A decision for funding has been expected for A27 improvements before Christmas but had been deferred due to the election. Announcements were expected in the Spring.

The Secretary of State for Transport had announced a review of the lines that were closed during the Beeching line cuts. Ms Caulfield had asked for the Lewes to Uckfield line to be looked at again and was working with the local “BML2” team to see if this could be taken forward. *Members noted that this line had not, in fact, been closed under the Beeching programme but later (1969) by East Sussex County Council; and asked that this be brought to Ms Caulfield’s attention.*

Sussex Police were returning to a community-based model where each village and town would have dedicated officers and PCSO’s. In October an extra 129 officers were recruited to help with this. Ms Caulfield was committed to supporting the police to get the funding needed to provide the services the public wants and needs.

A new timetable was introduced on Southern Rail in December which saw some previously removed services restored. A new Saturday hourly service would now stop at Cooksbridge and from May would also stop on Sundays. Residents were being encouraged to use this service. Flexible season tickets would be trialled on Southern Rail later this year so that there were cheaper community options available for passengers. Ms Caulfield was still

lobbying on the use of short formation trains as recently four carriage trains had been used on some services.

b) The Mayor reminded Members about “Open Door” a night shelter for homeless people who were short of volunteers.

c) “Seedy Saturday” would be held on February 1<sup>st</sup> in the Town Hall which the Mayor would attend.

d) The Police and Crime Commissioner had invited responses to a snap poll on the Police precept which would close on 30<sup>th</sup> January. Members were encouraged to respond using the link recently sent via an email from the Town Clerk.

e) Lewes District Remuneration Panel, set up to review Members’ Allowances, had issued an invitation for councillors to attend a session at 11am on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> January – if Members wished to attend they would need to pre-book a place.

f) Monday 27<sup>th</sup> January would mark Holocaust Memorial Day. A musical event would be held at St John Sub-Castro Church on 25<sup>th</sup> January, and the Mayor would host a ‘launch’ reception in the Council Chamber on 24<sup>th</sup> January.

g) The Mayor thanked all those Members and staff who had participated in the ‘Visioning’ exercise.

**FC2019/96 MINUTES:**

**It was resolved that:**

**FC2019/96.1** Minutes of the Council meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2019 are received and signed as an accurate record.

**FC2019/97 LEWES PRIORY:**

Members considered report (*FC016/2019 – copy in the Minute book*) which apprised members of a proposal by Lewes Priory Trust that an approach should be made to acquire the area of Scheduled Ancient Monument representing a large section of the Priory of St Pancras lying to the North of the railway line. This was applauded in a number of letters from local bodies and supporters, referred-to in the presentation of the proposal, including Friends of Lewes; Lewes History Group; Lewes District Council; East Sussex County Archaeologist; Dr Colin Brent; Historic England; Sussex Archaeological Society; Baroness Andrews (past Chair of the Commission for English Heritage), Arthur Franklin, and Lewes Archaeological Group.

The area of Lewes Priory owned by Lewes Town Council is only part of the site of the registered Scheduled Ancient Monument which was uncovered during creation of the railway line. To the North of the railway line is a large area which contained part of the main church building.

The Town Council acquired ownership of the sites of the Cluniac Priory of St Pancras – commonly known as Lewes Priory – from Lewes District Council in 2000. At that time the site was not distinguished from the adjacent Convent Field and was treated as additional parkland, containing a golf putting green, grassed amenity area, and the upstanding remains of the Priory which were surrounded by substantial security fencing and opened by arrangement only occasionally, for visits by academic parties.

Lewes Priory Trust had for many years attempted to secure adequate support for the conservation of the internationally-important remains and had masterminded a variety of *ad hoc* explorations and projects with permission of the owners. The aim of the Trust was to preserve and enhance the remains of the Priory and the surrounding area with the objective that it should become a facility of cultural, historic, educational and tourist importance of which the Town can be justifiably proud. Its detailed aims were set out in the development plan, which can be seen at [www.lewespriory.org.uk](http://www.lewespriory.org.uk).

In 2003 the Town Council and the Trust began discussions which resulted in the Trust being given a long lease of the site, running to August 2041, which enabled them to successfully obtain National Lottery funding for works to create the environment which is seen today. Alongside this lease is a management agreement which requires the Trust to

maintain and operate the site as a publicly-accessible park. The “Priory Park” is a great asset to the townscape, underpinning the broad academic and educational endeavours of the Trust, with its many partners and the European Federation of Cluniac Sites.

**It was resolved that:**

**FC2019/97.1** Lewes Town Council resolves to approach the owners of the area of Scheduled Ancient Monument representing a large section of the Priory of St Pancras, lying to the North of the railway line; with a view to discussing the possibility of acquisition by the Council..

**FC2019/98** **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) Finance Working Party 16<sup>th</sup> December 2019:** Council considered the minutes of this meeting:

1 It had been explained that outcomes from the current Council ‘visioning’ exercise would be likely to have budget implications, but that the Working Party was able to establish the ‘base’ budget at this stage; which would then be available at the forthcoming visioning event to allow modelling of any additional elements or significant changes which might arise. The final visioning evening would take place on 15<sup>th</sup> January, and any effects estimated and incorporated into the budget for presentation to Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> January. Council could not lawfully delegate the setting of precept, and the District Council awaited notification of the sum to be collected on behalf of the Town Council.

2 TC would elaborate upon the draft budget and explain underlying assumptions and reasoning, and factors such as value assumptions and estimated levels of increase for ‘standard’ elements such as insurances, utilities, staffing costs *etc.* Working Party Members should satisfy themselves that all these were reasonable.

3 It was explained that in the year of introduction (2013/14) of the Government’s Council Tax Reduction Support Grant (CTRSG) scheme (to offset government-imposed changes), Lewes District Council (LDC) had passed-on the whole amount which had been sufficient to maintain the Town Council’s “band ‘D’ equivalent” precept unchanged. This grant had subsequently reduced significantly each successive year and the District Council’s intentions for the forthcoming year were still unknown. After seven years, there was no certainty that the government would continue payments; or that LDC would continue to pass them on (it is discretionary). It was thought likely that the scheme would not continue and, with this in mind, for present purposes the working value included in the draft budget was ZERO. The Town Council therefore faced an enforced increase to precept of around £33,000 (3%), to cover nett expenditure at the level of the *current* year, before accounting for inflation and known increases *etc.*

4 TC explained the continuing threat that the government might extend its ‘referendum principles’ to higher-precepting Parishes such as Lewes Town Council, whereby a limit (currently 2%) was imposed upon precept increases, with exceptions subject to various criteria and an expensive public referendum. This would not apply to 2020/21 but Members should bear in mind that the threat remained and should it ever be imposed it would apply to the prevailing level of precept; which was merely ‘adequate’ in terms of current operational levels. The Council was also still subject to auditor’s advice that the uncommitted General Fund (depleted in recent years due to the cost of major repairs to the Town Hall) should be increased by at least £200,000. This was being achieved by an annual appropriation from precept of £50,000 solely for the purpose of building towards the recommended balance. Operating surpluses in recent years had been minimal.

5 With these points in mind, the Working Party considered the draft service budget estimates presented for 2020/21 and noted that alongside the Council’s financial systems generally, the assumptions and basic principles and the process of compiling the

recommended budget had again been commended by the Council's independent auditor during a recent inspection.

6 It was acknowledged that there was a continuing need to address the proper maintenance of the Council's physical assets; to adequately fund continuing services, and to continue the restoration of the General Fund with further allocation of precept. Building and engineering works were of particular concern in this regard, as the Council's assets had all been taken-on with considerable historic dilapidation, and contexts such as heritage listing status. Also; applications for grant from community organizations continued to increase in number and value as other sources, such as principal councils, diminished.

7 Councillors considered the draft annual plan; proposed contributions to reserves; and operational requirements, in detail. The draft budgets presented took account of:

- Provision for known/anticipated increases in Utility supplies, Non-Domestic Rate *etc.*
- Adjustments for completed and imminent (previously-approved) projects.
- Provision for elements identified in the Council's 'major items' plan.
- Appropriate reserves for agreed/anticipated projects.
- Provision for anticipated increases in insurance and other overhead costs *etc.*
- Provision for known adjustments to employers' pension and NI contribution rates.
- Refinement of overhead allocation to services and base service cost estimates.
- An estimated adjustment to salaries (the previous national agreement reached through the local government joint negotiating body had covered two years, expiring at the end of March 2020. National negotiations regarding April 2020 onward had been temporarily halted in November due to the national election and were expected to resume in early 2020).
- Provision for known and anticipated increases in cost of contracted services.
- Maintenance of the small grants fund, recognizing the consistently high level of applications received.
- Re-establishment of exhausted reserves and continuation of prudent contributions. Provision for costs of assets or services acquired through devolution.
- Fees & charges tariff increase of 5% proposed, rounded to an appropriate value for the service concerned.

8 The draft budget combined specific amounts for known costs and committed project items, with prudent allowances for reserves, and provided for a flexible response to unforeseen issues. The Council's major items plan was understood to be as expansive as could be practically undertaken.

9 Members of the working party were keen to make prudent estimates and maintain some flexibility in the budget, although concerned to keep increases within reasonable limits. Provision was made for all 'unavoidable' increases to give a base value, and 'live' modelling of various options was conducted throughout the meeting with the implications and overall impact assessed at each point. Borrowing could be available, through the Public Works Loans Board, and was to be used to complete the refurbishment of Malling Community Centre; but further borrowing was not considered appropriate at this time.

10 The budget, for further refinement in light of Visioning, was agreed in-principle and resulted in a nett funding requirement of £1,233,329 - an overall increase of 9.49%, although with the withdrawal of Council Tax Reduction Support Grant this must all be raised through precept. This would represent an actual increase compared with the current year precept of 12.76%, with the actual cost to a Band 'D' household rising to £200.91 per year. This would equate to an extra 44 pence per week.

**It was resolved that:**

**FC2019/98.1** The Minutes of the Finance Working Party (*copy in minute book*) held on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2019 are noted.

**b) Amendment to Councillors' individual duties:** Report FC0015/2019 (*copy in minute book*). was received, regarding changes to Members' appointed individual duties. It was noted that Cllr R Handy had stepped-down from service on the Personnel Panel, due to increasing work commitments. Council originally established a fixed complement for this Panel of six members, which had been exceeded; there was therefore no imperative to appoint a replacement.

**It was resolved that:**

**FC2018/98.2** The individual duties of Members for the remainder of the 2019/20 municipal year shall be as shown in the appendix to Report FC015/2019 (*copy in minute book*)

**FC2019/99**

## **COUNCIL FUTURE VISION:**

Members considered report (*FC017/2019, copy in the Minute book*) which summarized the exercise conducted, with assistance from the County Association, to clarify priorities and principles and inform the Council's future activities and policy direction from 2020.

The first 'Visioning Evening' had taken place on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2019, soon after the election (in May 2019) of a significant number of new Members without prior experience as local councillors. The event was attended by most councillors, the Town Clerk and members of the staff team, who worked in groups to discuss and itemize various matters.

This exercise elicited such things as functions/activities/services that Members felt the Council did well, or not so well, and provided some context against which to judge. The evening resulted in two lists: one listing 'items' that Members felt were essential for the Council to provide/performance and a second which described things that were seen as potential areas for development/specialization, or simply where the Council might better perform a function.

A second phase of the exercise on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2019, again attended by most Councillors and several members of staff, concentrated on the lists from the previous event and focused on the relative importance of each entry. Working in groups the items were each discussed, and consensus reached on a suitable 'score' or mark of importance. The individual group results were then amalgamated and used to rank the lists to show the overall relative importance of each item.

On 15<sup>th</sup> January 2020 the final phase, again well-attended by Members and staff, concentrated on each item with a view to clearly identifying the true nature of the entry and refining the "importance ranking". Context was established as:

- a. Items already in place or imminent that could be refined and/or have little resource implications = *Straightforward decision*
- b. Items that are not undertaken at present or may require more staff or financial resources allocation = *Needing consideration*
- c. Items that require additional, more detailed consideration and have significant staff or financial implications = *Needing very careful assessment*

The Council's Finance Working Party had previously agreed a base budget and level of precept in principle, and this was available for modelling the implications of items listed, as they were discussed. *NB: this final consideration of the council's budget requirement was the next-scheduled item on the agenda for this meeting.*

**It was resolved that:**

**FC2019/99.1** Council records its acceptance of the principles for future direction\* identified in Report FC0017/2019 (*copy in the Minute book*) and reported to Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2020. *\*The summary is appended to these Minutes.*

**FC2019/100**

## **BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX PRECEPT 2020/21:**

1 Members considered report (*FC018/2019, copy in minute book*) with recommended service expenditure and income budgets, provisions to earmarked financial Reserves, and Council Tax precept for the 2021/21 financial year, following assessment of values by the Finance Working Party and, subsequently, accommodating the results of the "Visioning" exercise (to clarify priorities/principles to inform Council's activities and policy direction).

2 The Finance Working Party had met on 16th December 2019 and considered service budgets in detail. Members had considered context and background information and values giving rise to draft services budgets, and a provisional figure for the resulting 2020/21 precept requirement. This was fully reported to Council earlier in this agenda via the Minutes of that meeting where Members agreed in-principle a base budget for further refinement during the Visioning conclusion held on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2020. It had been confirmed, since the Working party meeting, that there would be no further payments of the previous government-funded Council Tax Reduction Support Grant; loss of which, in itself, represents a 3% increase in precept to maintain the current level of nett expenditure. It was recommended that Council approve that budget and provisions for Reserves for the year commencing 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 and set the Council Tax precept accordingly. This would represent a 19.61% increase over the current year, equivalent to an extra 67pence per week payable by a Band 'D' household. The recommended precept was a product of underlying principles considered by the Working Party, and the inclusion of specific amounts for known costs and projects – those already mandated by Council, and those anticipated in the year – plus estimates for items arising from Visioning.

3 There followed a detailed discussion with live re-modelling of values presented on-screen. Some Members were uncomfortable with the level of increase involved; and comments reflected on the background. TC explained the broader local government financial environment; the relative financial position of the council, both in the context of its operational requirements and its aspirations, and in comparison with others; the continuing threat of government-imposed 'capping' (*aka "Referendum Principles"*), and the need to re-establish the General Fund at a level acceptable to auditors.

4 Considerable debate centred-upon provisions such as the Town Hall maintenance reserve (R1), which some members felt were excessive, and TC rehearsed the reasons for the recommendations, notably the overdue replacement of the Town Hall heating system and certain structural and other issues. Provisional costs were defended as the best-informed estimates available, and unlikely to prove excessive when market-tested.

5 The Council was exhorted to recognize its responsibility to decide based upon relevant factors only, and to avoid short-term or "populist" thinking. Regardless, several elements of the budget were revisited:

- the Miscellaneous Grant fund was increased by £15,000 (introduced at 'Visioning')
- further contribution to assist ESCC in providing pedestrian crossings (Reserve P9) was deleted, and the 2019/20 end-year balance is to be appropriated to Reserve R10 (Malling Community Centre).
- Recommended provision of £30,000 for Reserve R10 was deleted
- Recommended provision for Reserve R14A (Devolution) was reduced to £5,000
- Provision was made in Reserve P8 (Allotments improvements) of £500 to promote sustainable gardening practices
- Provision (introduced at 'Visioning') related to succession of retiring officers was deleted.
- Provision (introduced at 'Visioning') for an environmental audit of Lewes (tree cover/biodiversity *etc*) was reduced to £15,000

6 A precept of £1,213,829 was finally agreed by all, with one abstention, and can be analysed as a cost of £70.18 per head of population or £197.76 per 'band-D' equivalent property. This represents a 10.97% increase over the current year, equivalent to an extra 38pence per week payable by a Band 'D' household. The figure of 6,137.9 properties used to calculate this is the 2020 "tax-base" value advised by Lewes District Council (LDC).

After a lengthy debate **it was resolved that:**

**FC2019/100.1** Fees and Charges for Council facilities and services be increased by 5% (rounded to an appropriate value for the service concerned) from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020

**FC2019/100.2** Budgets for estimated operational service expenditure and income and contributions to financial Reserves for the 2020/21 financial year; recommended by the

Finance Working Party following its meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2019 and subsequently revised by Council at its meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2020, be approved.

**FC2019/100.3** The total sum to be raised by precept on council tax for 2020/21 be set at £1,213,829 and Lewes District Council be asked to collect this sum.

**FC2019/100.4** The Council Plan for major areas of work or projects in 2020/21 (*Copy in minute book*) proposed by the Finance Working Party following its meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2019, is approved.

**FC2019/101 MAYORALTY 2020/21:**

The matter of nomination of a Mayor-elect and Deputy Mayor-elect for the 2020/21 municipal year was tabled, and the Mayor invited nominations for the roles. Proposals were received and consequently **it was resolved that:**

**FC2019.101.1** Cllr Catlin is nominated Mayor-Elect for the 2020/21 municipal year.

**FC2019.101.2** Cllr Makepeace is nominated Deputy Mayor-Elect for the 2020/21 year.

**FC2019/102 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.
- b) It was noted that publicity the Offham Road tree works (by Eastbourne Borough/Lewes District Council's PR agency – Cobb PR) should begin in early February (adverts/letters/posters/direct contact *etc*) and works were expected to run in early March – *all at this stage subject to confirmation.*

**FC2019/103 NOTICE of ITEMS IN PROSPECT**

*Members were asked to consider items, arising from this meeting, worthy of a Press Release, and indicated:* Budget and Council Tax Precept 2020/21

*Dates to note* were given as:

- The Personnel Panel would meet at 7:00pm on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020.
- The next Member's Surgery would be between 10am-12noon on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> February in the Corn Exchange. Cllrs Catlin and Lamb volunteers to attend.
- The next Planning Committee meeting would be at 7pm on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> February -this would include a presentation by agents for Aldi *re* their latest revisions to planned store redevelopment. The subsequent meeting would be on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> February.
- The next deadline for grants applications (cycle 4 of 4) would be 24<sup>th</sup> January, for a Panel sitting on 5<sup>th</sup> February with Council's decision on 27<sup>th</sup> February. If Members knew of any organisation who may be planning to apply, please draw their attention to these dates (all 4 cycles were on the cover of the Application Pack, available at the website).
- PROVISIONAL ONLY at this stage* (awaiting INFO from LDC): Devolution Working Party on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> February.
- PROVISIONAL ONLY at this stage* (awaiting INFO from LDC): Pells land exchange Working Party 11:00am Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> February.
- Landport Bottom Management Committee would meet at 7:0pm on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> February.
- The next Council meeting would take place on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2010 at 7:30pm, with a deadline for agenda items to reach TC by noon on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> February.
- With effect from 1<sup>st</sup> February 2020 all email correspondence from the office would be addressed solely to Members 'corporate' address and published material would be amended appropriately.

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 9.25pm*

Signed: ..... Date: .....

**Principles arising from 2019/20 'Visioning' exercise**

Area of activity, or theme	Comment
Services, activities and projects currently operated by Council	<p><i>All items that were listed as 'ESSENTIAL' and categorized as items already in place or imminent that could be refined and/or have little resource implications</i></p> <p>There was general discussion regarding the context of the items listed, and it was acknowledged that they represented salient activities within the Council's normal operations that had initially been seen as 'key' functions, although with further analysis it was understood that they may be simply more 'obvious' than others.</p> <p>It was agreed that High priority should be given to the Council's buildings; allotments; grants scheme; community partnerships and support for outside bodies and public events; The Pells area, Lewes Priory; and Landport Bottom.</p>
Successor on retirement of Town Clerk	Financial provision added to assist with immediate priorities.
<p align="center"><b>Area of activity, or theme</b></p>	<p><i>All items that were listed as 'POTENTIAL' and categorized as items either not undertaken at present or deserving refinement; and needing careful consideration of resource implications and/or in-depth assessment, research or specific allocation of resources.</i></p>
Transport-related: Infrastructure & signage, cycling routes; bus transport;	Council can influence & assist funding. Council can directly provide some infrastructure.
Openness; engagement; consultation; partnership	Council can bring disparate groups together, consult, and influence discussions. Council can exceed statutory requirements for transparency in governance.
Trees & Biodiversity; wildlife & the environment; Open spaces	Council seeks measurable improvements over term of administration, reflecting decisions with specific effect in these areas and/or occasions when influence exerted ( <i>eg</i> encouragement to Planning applicants)
Support for foodbanks & the disadvantaged.	Include specific focus in any revision of policy for Financial Grants Scheme. Increase amount budgeted.
Encourage participation of, and facilities for, youth in the working of the community.	Exercise influence wherever appropriate and remain alert to occasions when Council could directly affect.
Encourage Youth festival with Twin towns	Investigate in partnership with Lewes Twinning Association and its counterparts, and the Councils of the twin towns.
Possible establishment of a Lewes Arts Council	Investigate arts and event promotion; seek support for principle and potential to form a lead body.
Public water fountains (drinking water)	Sustainability Goals W/party asked to seek three locations