



MINUTES

of a meeting of the **Planning Committee** held on **Tuesday 24th November 2020**, online *via* Zoom Meetings, Lewes at 7.00pm.

Present: Cllrs Dr J Baah; S Catlin (*Chairman*); R Handy; J Lamb; I Makepeace; M Milner; S Sains, and (*not appointed to the committee*) Cllr M Bird.

In attendance: S Brigden (*Town Clerk*); Mrs E Tingley (*Committee Admin*) and Ms Lucy Howard (*Planning Policy Manager, South Downs National Park Authority*)

PC2020/001 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Apologies were noted from Cllr Dr Maples, who had a conflicting commitment.

It was resolved that:

PC2020/001.1 Apologies for absence from this meeting are noted

PC2020/002 **MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** Cllr Makepeace declared her membership of Lewes Swift Supporters.

PC2020/003 **QUESTION TIME:** There were no questions

PC2020/004 **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS:** The Chair welcomed representatives of the Lewes Swift Supporters Group and would shortly ask them to elaborate upon the advice leaflet that was attached to the Agenda for the evening. He expressed gratitude to LSS and welcomed this assistance, although he was obliged to clarify that the item on the meeting agenda was to establish whether or not the Committee was prepared to acknowledge the advice as standing guidance in its future deliberations.

It was likely, he said, that this would be so, and after that point it would be acceptable to refer to it as "acknowledged by" the Council, but it should be recorded that the statement that it was produced "on behalf of" the Council was not correct.

Further: in documents registered with the Planning Authority in relation to the Astley House development proposals, it was stated that the work was produced "in collaboration with" the Council. Whilst it was understood that individual Members had indeed assisted, that claim was also incorrect.

The Committee, and LSS, should be alert to the potential for uninformed readers to infer some 'official' or regulatory status from such remarks.

It was also important to note that the formal status of the Committee was unchanged in that the Council's 'local comment', as defined in law, may be supported by accepted advice from informed sources but any suggestion by the Committee that conditions should be attached to planning consent would still not automatically result in such condition. The Planning Officer handling any case remained the final arbiter, having matched a request to prevailing law and policy.

PC2020/005 **LEWES SWIFT SUPPORTERS GROUP:** The meeting welcomed Mike Ramsey of Lewes Swift Supporters, and Richard Cowser, Conservation Officer for Sussex Ornithological Society. Mr Ramsey presented a leaflet designed to assist anyone considering a development in the aspects relevant to the conservation of Swifts (*Apus apus*). He explained:

Lewes Swift Supports (LSS) are an organisation of local volunteers, set up in 2015 with support from Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS) & Sussex Wildlife Trust. The prime

objective is to increase the number of Swifts nesting in Lewes and the surrounding area through providing and encouraging more Swift nesting. The Swift is a bird that is ‘amber listed’, with a national population that has declined 57% between 1995 and 2017, and totally relies on buildings to provide its nest sites. Retaining and increasing the number of nesting swifts in Lewes could form part of the nett gain in biodiversity that is increasingly required by legislation. The South Downs National Park Authority considered that this was a valid consideration in assessment of applications and had welcomed initiatives to improve the situation.

LSS has written the document entitled ‘Consideration of Swift Accommodation when Considering a Planning Application’. This explained that Swifts only nest in buildings and an ever-increasing shortage of nest sites is one significant factor driving their population decline. Swifts nest at over 4.5m (15 feet) above the ground and usually in small colonies near where other Swifts are already established. The leaflet depicts a “Red Zone” within the town where it would be helpful to conduct further tests to establish whether Swifts might be practically supported. It offered a series of detailed criteria against which Members of the Planning Committee could test applications under consideration which, if satisfied, would indicate that the applicant should be encouraged to include Swift accommodation such as externally mounted nest boxes fitted under the eaves or “Swift bricks” which can be incorporated in a new wall of a building.

Members thanked Mr Ramsey for his interesting and informative presentation and agreed that the leaflet would be extremely helpful in their consideration of planning applications. TC would liaise with Mr Ramsey regarding any minor textual amendments that may be needed but there was general approval, and thanks were offered to the Group for its work in preparing the advice. Subsequently, **it was resolved that:**

PC2020/005.1 The leaflet entitled ‘*Consideration of Swift Accommodation when Considering a Planning Application*’ (copy in the Minute Book), prepared by the Lewes Swift Supporters Group, is adopted as a standard reference for use in considering planning applications before the Committee subject to minor textual amendments as discussed.

PC2020/006

PLANNING APPLICATIONS: The Committee considered revisions to Application ref SDNP/19/05619/FUL *Astley House, Spital Road, Lewes*.

The Committee’s original comments on the application were:

“Members regret an apparently cynical application of Vacant Building Allowance to provide less affordable units than expected. This is a morally unacceptable contradiction of Local and Neighbourhood Plan Policies and also the size of units ignores statements in both Plans in that the need is for more 1,2,&3-bedroom homes. Members were concerned regarding parking provisions as it appears there is insufficient parking to provide for all units and Members consider all parking should be on-site. Councillors are also aware of concerns expressed by residents regarding potential loss of trees and the ambiguity regarding site boundaries and would appreciate clarification. Members agreed with comments published by the Friends of Lewes regarding the gateway aspects and visual presentation which they feel needs improvement; and were also aware of concerns that Accessible units appear to have no outside space. There were also concerns regarding the proposed use of gas central heating system. Members **STRONGLY OBJECT** to this application.”

There followed a lengthy discussion regarding the revised plans, touching upon aspects such as the removal of mature trees; the proposed use of gas boilers and opportunities for the inclusion of solar/PV panels on roofs. Key concerns were the proposals in relation to affordable housing, and the developer’s arguments around viability were described as ‘spurious’. Ms Howard outlined the National Park Authority’s view, commenting that affordable housing levels were more important inside a National Park than outside, and Astley House was seen as a key site.

Member’s maintained their **STRONG OBJECTION** to the proposals and reiterated their concerns that this was a gateway location; that affordable homes were essential; and stated that the value/viability arguments were unacceptable. The proposal to design around the

fitting of gas-fired heating was criticized in view of Government policy statements on the imminent phasing-out of such systems nationally, and it was commented that the architectural and materials quality should be higher, as they do not reflect the standards expected for an Ancient County Town within a National Park.

Further to the earlier discussion on threats to Swift populations, it was proposed that the development was an ideal site for the inclusion of ‘Swift-bricks’ as it was close to a known “hotspot” in Western Road and offered suitable aspects for the siting of over 100 bricks – enough to sustain a sizeable colony of the birds. It was recommended that the developer is encouraged to consult with Lewes Swift Supporters at lewesswifts@gmail.com to investigate this potential.

PC2020/007

MISCELLANEOUS PLANNING ISSUES:

There were none

There being no other business, the Chairman thanked everyone for their valued contributions and closed the meeting.

The meeting ended at 8:10pm

Signed:

Date:

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